

TACONIC STATE PARKWAY  
Poughkeepsie Vicinity  
Dutchess County  
New York

HAER NO. NY-316

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HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20240

# HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

## TACONIC STATE PARKWAY

HAER No. NY-316

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### Location:

The Taconic State Parkway extends for a distance of 105.3 miles through the east side of the Hudson River Valley in New York State. It passes through four counties and provides access to a series of state park recreation areas. The parkway follows a north-south course through the central sections of Westchester, Putnam, Dutchess, and Columbia counties, mid-way between the Hudson River and the Connecticut and Massachusetts borders. The parkway encompasses 21.6 miles of roadway in Westchester County, 13.5 miles in Putnam County, 38.6 miles in Dutchess County and 31.6 miles in Columbia County.

### Designers:

The Taconic State Parkway (TSP) was designed and built by the Westchester County Park Commission (WCPC), the Taconic State Park Commission (TSPC), and the New York State Department of Public Works (DPW). The Westchester County section, built in two parts as the Bronx Parkway Extension (BPE) and a short connector spur, was planned, designed and built by the WCPC between 1923 and 1932. WCPC engineers Jay Downer and Leslie Holleran were in charge of construction and WCPC landscape architects Gilmore Clarke and Herman Merkel supervised landscape development. The TSP from Putnam through Columbia counties was planned, designed and built between 1925 and 1963. This portion was designed and built by the TSPC and the DPW. TSPC Chief Engineer E.J. Howe was responsible for the earliest phases of design and construction, between 1926 and 1928. He was succeeded by James W. Bradner, Jr., who served as engineer between 1930 and 1933. Beginning in 1933, DPW Regional Manager James Bixby oversaw general construction, supervising a team of designers, including assistant civil engineer Charles E. Baker, who prepared road plans, profiles, and construction drawings. TSPC landscape architect Theodore Bowman guided landscape design throughout the development process.

### Construction Dates:

The Taconic State Parkway was conceived in 1925 as part of a large-scale recreation and transportation system linking a series of state and county parks areas in the Hudson Valley region of New York State. The sections of the parkway in Putnam, Dutchess, and Columbia counties were constructed between 1931 and 1963. The Westchester County sections were designed and constructed between 1923 and 1932 and formally incorporated into the Taconic State Parkway in 1941.

### Present Use:

The Taconic State Parkway's primary use is as a scenic motor parkway restricted to private passenger vehicles. Its southern section, through

Westchester County to NY 55 in Dutchess County, has become a heavily traveled commuter thoroughfare. From mid-Dutchess County to its northern terminus at Interstate 90, the TSP retains the qualities of a scenic motor parkway designed for recreational driving.

Present Owner: New York State Department of Transportation

Significance: The Taconic State Parkway represents an important development in the evolution of American transportation planning, park development, and roadway design. Conceived in the 1920s during the height of America's parkway-building boom, the post-war construction remained true to early parkway principles of promoting outdoor recreation, showcasing picturesque scenery, stimulating economic growth, and maintaining sensitivity to natural terrain and regional landscape qualities. Some observers characterized it as the culmination of classic parkway development strategies, extending parkway development to a regional scale and accommodating relatively high-speed motor traffic. The TSP has a national reputation as one of the most sophisticated interpretations of parkway and divided highway design in the United States.

Project Information: Documentation of the Taconic State Parkway was undertaken during the summer of 1999 by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) a division of the National Park Service, E. Blaine Cliver, Chief. The project was sponsored by the New York State Department of Transportation Region 8, Robert A. Dennison, P.E., Regional Director. Research assistance was provided by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP), Bernadette Castro, Commissioner. Project supervisor was Christopher Marston, HAER architect. Timothy Davis, HAER historian, supervised the research team.

The summer 1999 documentation team consisted of architectural supervisor Sara Sweeney (University of California, Berkeley), architectural technicians Lauren Bostic (University of Virginia) and W. Pete Brooks (Yale University). Leonard Warner (San Francisco State University) served as field supervisor. The historic overview was written by historians Leonard Warner (parkway planning, design and construction) and Kathleen LaFrank (OPRHP) (parks, roads, and the TSPC) and edited by Timothy Davis. Large-format photographs were produced by David Haas.

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## INTRODUCTION

This report provides a narrative history of the planning, design, and development of the Taconic State Parkway (TSP). It provides an overview of the various social, technical, aesthetic, and administrative contexts that influenced the parkway's inception and development and then details the planning ideals, transportation goals, design strategies, bureaucratic procedures, and construction methods practiced throughout the thirty-six year period of the parkway's original construction. The TSP provides an important example of the progression of mid-twentieth century recreation planning and motorway design. Over the course of its development, the TSP utilized a variety of evolving planning principles, highway engineering standards, design strategies, and construction techniques. Since the development of Taconic State Parkway was predicated on its role within a broadly conceived statewide system of public parks and parkways, this report contains an overview of the evolution of the New York State Park System, which provides important information about the parkway's broader purpose and legislative authority. Likewise, a summary of parkway design precedents helps place Taconic State Parkway within the context of other notable projects, most importantly the Bronx River Parkway and Westchester County Park Commission projects that strongly influenced the TSP conception, design, and development. Finally, this report recounts recent changes to the TSP and summarizes key management policies in effect at the time it was written.

Although this report covers the history of the entire parkway, from Kensico Dam in Westchester County to I-90 in Columbia County, it focuses on the 80-mile portion designed and built by the Taconic State Park Commission, comprising the sections in Putnam, Dutchess, and Columbia counties. Planning for this portion began in 1925, construction was initiated in 1931, and the project was deemed complete in 1963. The parkway was known variously as the Eastern State Parkway and the Taconic State Parkway until 1941, when the latter designation was officially adopted. The two Westchester County sections, which preceded the formal development of Taconic State Parkway, were originally designated the Bronx Parkway Extension and the "connector spur." This report will refer to the earlier sections under their original names (or as the Westchester sections) until 1941, when they officially became part of the Taconic State Parkway.

The northern Taconic State Parkway, built under the authority of the Taconic State Park Commission, was planned both as an extension of the Westchester County park and parkway system and as an integral component of the broader New York state park system. The Bronx Parkway and Westchester County Park commissions, national leaders in parkway planning, design, and construction, had advanced the scenic automobile parkway as a particular type of transportation and recreation system based on a limited-access driveway traversing a broad landscaped right-of-way linking scenic and recreation areas. This approach emerged from an interdisciplinary collaboration between highway engineers and landscape architects, creating a multi-purpose parkway corridor enfolding a roadway designed in harmony with its physical context. The State of New York employed similar policies in the development of the Northern and Southern State parkways on Long Island and would extend this approach in the development of the TSP, which was initially designated the Eastern State Parkway in recognition of its role in

the statewide park plan. The vast territory traversed by the TSP contained a variety of landscape types, however, and the characteristics of this cultural landscape, together with the parkway's greater length, called for new solutions aimed at incorporating a wider range of roadside views and travelers' needs.

The parkway has historically accommodated both recreational travelers and commuters. Its southern tip extended through the suburban communities of Westchester County, while its northern sections stretched into lightly populated agricultural districts. This dual identity complicated location and design decisions, and the parkway's ultimate purpose and northern terminus were debated throughout its construction history. When New York State began planning the Thruway system in the early 1940s, planners focused on the parkway's potential as a high-speed transportation corridor. Despite pressures to adjust the parkway route to serve the needs of thruway planners, the Taconic State Park Commission completed its mission to construct a limited-access parkway devoted to recreational travel through the east Hudson Valley.

The TSP has evolved in recent years to accommodate increasing traffic demands. Reconstruction projects in its southern sector have introduced asphalt shoulders, additional driving lanes, and realigned segments. Ongoing projects are aimed at enhancing the safety and efficiency of some northern sections, chiefly through minor widening of existing paved shoulder areas. Though these modifications have compromised some of the character-defining features of the mid-twentieth century motor parkway—and some of the viewsheds surrounding the parkway have changed as well—the TSP's central and northern sections retain a significant degree of historical integrity. For more than seventy years the parkway has continued to serve its original goal: to provide metropolitan area populations with direct and convenient access to the scenic and historic countryside of the Hudson River Valley. The parkway's designation in 1992 as a Scenic Byway suggests that its role as a scenic pleasure drive remains as vital today as when it was first proposed in the early decades of the twentieth century.

## DESCRIPTION

The Taconic State Parkway (TSP) is a limited-access scenic pleasure drive located east of the Hudson River in New York State. The parkway extends a total of 105.3 miles from the Kensico Dam Plaza in Westchester County to its northern terminus at the Berkshire Spur of the New York State Thruway (I-90) near East Chatham in Columbia County. The TSP travels through four counties and provides direct access to four state parks. Its course encompasses 21.6 miles of roadway in Westchester County, 13.5 miles in Putnam County, 38.6 miles in Dutchess County and 31.6 miles in Columbia County. Access is restricted to passenger vehicles; commercial vehicles are prohibited.

The TSP is a component of a regional recreation/transportation system that includes the Bronx River Parkway, the Westchester County Parks and Parkways system, the Bear Mountain Parkway, the Palisades Interstate Parkway, and a number of individual state parks. Its

southernmost section functions as a commuter thoroughfare, while the central and northern sections, more lightly traveled, retain the qualities of a scenic pleasure drive devoted to recreational motoring. Reconstruction projects dating from the mid-1950s to the present have significantly altered the parkway's historic design in Westchester County by introducing asphalt shoulders, additional driving lanes and realigned roadway segments. North of I-84, from central Dutchess County to its terminus at the Berkshire Thruway, the parkway's original design remains substantially intact.

The southern section of the TSP intersects with a network of Westchester County parkways. Its southern terminus connects with the Bronx River Parkway at the Kensico Dam Plaza in Valhalla and intersects with the Sprain Brook and Saw Mill River parkways at the Hawthorne Interchange. The Sprain Brook Parkway extends for 12.5 miles from the Bronx River Parkway at Mount Vernon to its junction with the Hawthorne Interchange. The Saw Mill River Parkway provides a connection to New York City's Henry Hudson Parkway. It extends 29.8 miles from the New York City line, intersects with the TSP and the Sprain Brook Parkway at the Hawthorne Interchange and continues in a northeasterly direction to the village of Brewster, its northern terminus at Interstate 684. The Briarcliff-Peekskill Parkway (NY 9A) extends 7.2 miles between the Hawthorne Interchange and Ossining. The final link in the regional parkway network on the east side of the Hudson River is the Bear Mountain Parkway, which connects with the TSP in Yorktown. The Bear Mountain Parkway is a 3.9-mile combination parkway and mixed-use roadway leading to the historic Bear Mountain Bridge. The bridge spans the Hudson River at Bear Mountain, leading directly to the Palisades Interstate Parkway, which extends south for 42 miles on the western side of the Hudson River.

In addition to its parkway connections, the TSP is also integrated into the regional interstate highway system. Its northern terminus forms a junction with I-90 and provides a direct connection to the Albany Capital District or to points east via the Massachusetts Turnpike. Interstate 84 intersects the parkway in southern Dutchess County, allowing parkway travelers high-speed access to Connecticut to the east or to the New York State Thruway (Interstate 87) on the Newburgh-Beacon Bridge.

#### Topography

Traveling in a northerly direction through the central sections of Westchester, Putnam, Dutchess and Columbia counties, the TSP generally parallels the route of the Hudson River, which is located approximately 10 miles to the west of the parkway corridor. The major landscape features along its route—hills and valleys, small brooks and streams—are oriented in a northeast-southwest direction. Thus, the parkway constantly rises and falls in elevation as it traverses the diverse landforms of its extensive four-county territory. The parkway's southern section passes through the Manhattan Hills of northern Westchester County before entering the Hudson Highlands in Putnam County. Throughout Dutchess and Columbia counties, the parkway skirts the western piedmont of the Taconic range, also known as the Berkshire Hills.

The parkway passes through two distinct geomorphic regions—the Hudson and Taconic highlands. Its southernmost section, from Kensico Plaza to Yorktown, travels through the

Hawthorne Valley, which is the southeastern extension of the Hudson River Valley. The topography is level and gentle hills rise to the east and west. The parkway enters the Manhattan Hills, the southernmost spur of the Hudson Highlands, in northern Westchester County, north of the Croton Reservoir. The Manhattan Hills are formed of a combination of crystalline rocks, schist, gneiss and Fordham limestone and create a landscape of gently rising, rounded hills interspersed with low valleys. Near the Putnam County border at Shrub Oak, the TSP enters the sharply rising hills of the Hudson Highlands.

The Hudson Highlands are a series of small mountains composed of pre-Cambrian granite and granite-injected crystalline rocks. Numerous brooks, creeks, streams and kills flowing from springs and the many natural lakes in Putnam County cross under the parkway to drain into the Hudson River. The topographical characteristics of the Hudson Highlands—steep, heavily forested hills, narrow hollows and valleys, and massive rock outcrops—confine the road in a narrow, intimate corridor with restricted views. The parkway is often canopied with heavy roadside vegetation and views are foreshortened by the surrounding hills. The woodlands of Putnam County are a combination of mature deciduous and evergreen forests, with many stands of ancient oak, sugar maple, beech, red pine, and hemlock. Flowering mountain laurel, rhododendron shrubs, and honeysuckle contribute to the diverse understory on the forest floor.

From the parkway's highest point in Putnam County, where it achieves an elevation of nearly 1,200', the TSP descends toward Dutchess County. The terrain of Dutchess County contrasts with the dramatic steep hills of the Highlands. Geologists have designated this region as part of the Great Valley, the longest valley in the eastern United States, extending from Alabama to Quebec, Canada. To the south, the Great Valley continues through the Tennessee, Shenandoah and Cumberland valleys. Dutchess County's underlying bedrock formation of sedimentary rocks, deposited by ancient sources of water flooding the valley, has resulted in a haphazard distribution of sand, gravel and boulders left behind when the glacier retreated. Formations of schist and sedimentary limestone, sandstone, shale, and slates of various ages dominate the geology of southern and central Dutchess County.

This geological process created a landscape of wide valleys interspersed with gently rising hills. Parkway views throughout Dutchess County vary as the corridor alternates between enclosed, tunnel-like spaces and expansive open terrain, providing perspectives of the surrounding mid-Hudson Valley countryside. Much of northern Dutchess County's geological formation is made of Hudson River peltite, which consists of fine particles of mud or clay. Characteristic native trees in Dutchess County include the hickory, sycamore, basswood (or American Linden), white and northern red oak, soft maple, horse chestnut, black walnut, and tulip (or yellow) poplar.

As the parkway reaches Columbia County, Ordovician-period sandstone, shales and limestones predominate. Common trees include the sugar maple, beech, spruce and ash. Species such as the locust and willow are also widespread. Settlement since the mid-eighteenth century has altered the original landscape, so that the forests of the region are now second- and third-growth

regeneration.<sup>1</sup> Columbia County's landscape of expansive agricultural valleys and forested hills allows distant views, encompassing the broad Hudson River Valley and the Catskill Mountains to the west. Views to the east provide perspectives of the Berkshire Hills.

#### Alignment

The TSP was constructed between 1931 and 1963. The later, northern sections reflect improved highway engineering practices developed in the post-war era. Longer tangents, sweeping horizontal curves and gentle grade changes were designed for the higher driving speeds of the 1950s and 60s. The parkway's alignment also responds to the varied topography through which it passes, which changes dramatically from its southern section to its northern terminus. The variable topography is reflected in the maximum lengths of horizontal curves throughout the parkway alignment. In the more rugged terrain of Putnam County, steep hills and narrow hollows produced a winding alignment with relatively sharp curves and minimal tangents; horizontal curvature reaches a maximum length of 11,459'-0", which is approximately half the maximum curvature found further north along the parkway.<sup>2</sup>

The TSP generally follows a serpentine path on individually aligned divided roadways. Due to the constricted terrain of Putnam County, however, the parkway's original north- and south-bound roadways often shared a single alignment, separated only by a central median barrier. A series of tight reverse curves in central Putnam County contrasts to the tangents and gradual transition curves of the parkway's alignment through Westchester. Because of the topography of the Hudson Highlands, the parkway is often benched into hillsides on a single alignment. As it passes through the northern section of Fahnestock Park the alignments shift and separated roadways pursue independent courses at varying elevations.

In Dutchess County, the north- and south-bound roadways follow independent alignments, which are often located at differing elevations and separated by a broad landscaped median that ranges between 40' and 100' wide. Intermittent wide-radii horizontal curves and gentle vertical crests and dips carry the parkway through the rolling Dutchess County landscape.

Throughout most of Columbia County the parkway drives follow independent alignments, separated by a median between 70'-0" and 150'-0" wide. The separated drives come together only at bridges and overpasses. The broad terrain of the mid-Hudson Valley allowed the parkway to stretch out in broad gentle arcs, appearing to fit naturally into the countryside as it rises and falls with the hills of Columbia County. Long tangents and horizontal curves measuring 22,277'-0" in Dutchess County and 22,918'-0" in Columbia County were designed to conform to the more open terrain.

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<sup>1</sup> Edith Adelaide Roberts and Helen Wilkinson Reynolds, *The Role of Plant Life in the History of Dutchess County* (Poughkeepsie, NY: by the authors, 1938).

<sup>2</sup> Technical information describing parkway design characteristics is derived from "Record Plans, Region 8, TSP-33-1- through 62-2," New York State Department of Transportation, Poughkeepsie, New York (hereafter NYSDOT).

The parkway is generally banked, or superelevated, at significant curves. Banked curves serve to counteract centrifugal force on moving vehicles and allow drivers to move with greater ease and safety around horizontal curves. Superelevation achieves a maximum incline of 4.5 percent in the southern section and 2.3 percent in the central and northern sections.

#### Interchanges and Intersections

Parkway interchanges include full and partial cloverleaf interchanges and simple overpasses and underpasses, as well as at-grade intersections with local streets and roads. A full cloverleaf interchange at the junction with I-84 in East Fishkill features exit and entrance ramps on both northbound and southbound parkway drives. Other grade-separated interchanges usually feature two entry and exit ramps—one each for northbound and southbound drivers. In these instances entering and exiting traffic share single undivided ramps. The interchange at I-84 (completed in 1964) is unique for the TSP: ramps to enter or exit the parkway are provided in each direction so drivers do not share ramps with opposing traffic. Acceleration and deceleration lanes allow safe transitions between the parkway and I-84.

There are approximately twenty-five grade-separated interchanges on the parkway. Grade-separated interchanges appear in a variety of configurations but generally feature landscaped islands in the space between the parkway drive and the exit and entrance ramps. Short deceleration and acceleration lanes are usually provided at grade-separated interchanges to enhance safety as drivers turn on or off the parkway.

At-grade intersections occur at regular intervals throughout the length of the parkway. In Westchester County these intersections are controlled by stoplights. Street signs indicate the remainder of at-grade intersections. Stoplights at Lakeview Avenue, Commerce Street and Stephens Avenue in Westchester County allow motorists to exit at-grade or to cross the opposing parkway drive for access to local streets. The parkway's central section through Dutchess County features the majority of at-grade intersections. The busiest at-grade intersections occur in southern and central sections of Dutchess County, where suburban development has increased in recent years. Carpenter Road, Stormville Road, Bogardus Lane, Noxon Road and Todd Hill Road in southern Dutchess County are busy at-grade intersections where parkway traffic is sometimes slowed as drivers negotiate the 90° turns. Northern Dutchess County at-grade intersections, at Nine Partners and Cold Spring roads serve lighter traffic than those in southern Dutchess County. In Columbia County, at-grade intersections are less frequent and not as heavily used as those in northern Dutchess County.

#### Bridges

Parkway bridges encompass a wide-range of structural types. Steel suspension and truss bridges carry the parkway over the Croton Reservoir. Concrete-arch, concrete rigid-frame, steel rigid-frame, and steel girder bridges carry cross roads over or under the parkway. Many of these bridges use rough-cut stone masonry on faces and on architectural embellishments. In addition, small culvert bridges span creeks and cross seasonal wetland areas.

Two monumental bridges carry the TSP over the Croton Reservoir in Westchester County. The northbound parkway drive crosses the reservoir on a 750'-0"-span triple-hinged steel suspension bridge built in 1931. Massive Art Deco style reinforced concrete abutments function as graceful portals and anchor the bridge to the banks of the Croton Reservoir. A 1,362'-0"-span steel truss bridge erected in 1971 carries the southbound parkway drive. Both bridges were widely recognized upon their completion as significant engineering achievements. When the first bridge opened in 1931, it was the longest bridge of its type in the world. The American Institute of Steel Construction honored the steel truss bridge as the most attractive medium-span low-clearance bridge built that year.<sup>3</sup>

Concrete-arch bridges erected in the early 1930s are consistently clad with rusticated stone masonry laid in a buff-colored mortar. Parapet walls and posts with copings complete their architectural details. Landscape treatments at the abutments help blend these structures into the landscape. Grade separation structures carry crossroads over or under the parkway in various configurations. They are often paired to carry the divided roadway over intersecting streets. Rustic stone-clad concrete-arch bridges are located at the underpass for Legion Drive and at interchanges at NY 134 and U.S. 6 in Yorktown Heights in Westchester County. In Putnam County a concrete-arch bridge is located at the interchange for NY 301.

Concrete rigid-frame arch bridges dating from the late 1930s to the early 1940s are located at the intersections with NY 52, NY 55 and NY 44 in Dutchess County, as well as at the interchange with the Salt Point Turnpike. These bridges feature similar masonry work and continue the architectural details of the bridges dating from the early 1930s. Ulster County bluestone veneer on bridge faces and on abutments is laid in a random pattern in buff-colored mortar. The dual-span Salt Point Turnpike overpass is a significant feature in the parkway's mid-Dutchess County landscape. Similar bridges at NY 52, NY 55 and NY 44 are underpass bridges and are therefore less prominent in the parkway viewshed.

Steel girder underpass bridges at NY 23 and NY 203 in Columbia County are faced with the same masonry work as Dutchess County bridges. While they differ structurally, their architectural details—stone-clad exposed faces, parapet walls with posts and copings as well as landscape treatments at the abutments—serve to unify the design of the variety of bridge types on the parkway's central and northern sections. However, steel girder underpasses at CR 35 in Columbia County, at Bryant Pond Road in Putnam County, and at Pines Bridge and Illington roads in Westchester County lack the masonry work of other parkway underpass bridges.

Several exceptionally styled bridges in Westchester County complete the variety of bridge structural types and architectural styles. At the interchange for Underhill Avenue in Westchester County two wing-walled stone-clad grade separation structures feature closely set, light-colored stone on the exposed curving bridge faces. The first grade separation structure, designed by Gilmore Clarke, was completed in 1954 to carry Underhill Avenue over both northbound and

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<sup>3</sup> The Croton Reservoir Bridge was awarded first prize in the category for bridges with vertical clearances of less than 35 ft. and more than 400 ft. in length. American Institute of Steel Construction, *Prize Bridges of 1971* (New York: n.p., 1971).

southbound drives. In 1972, a second grade separation structure—nearly identical in design—was erected to carry the northbound parkway drive. An overpass concrete frame bridge built in 1965 at Baldwin Road features a distinctive rose-colored stone set in a light colored mortar. The Baldwin Road overpass spans three lanes of traffic in each direction and its slender center column and narrow ringstones create a sweeping, elegant profile.

Underpass structures and culverts over streams and seasonal creeks are less visually prominent in the parkway's designed landscape than overpass bridges. Culverts are occasionally visible at curves in the road or at grade separations throughout the length of the parkway. They continue the stylistic unity of the parkway's many other bridges and feature typical rusticated stone masonry work.

#### Surface

Most of the original roadway surface was constructed of reinforced concrete slabs. In the late 1950s asphaltic concrete was used between NY 82 and the parkway's northern terminus at I-90. The concrete roadbed was constructed as individual, poured-in-place reinforced concrete slabs connected by transverse expansion joints on a gravel sub-base. Due to reconstruction projects, asphalt surfacing overlays the original concrete road in Westchester, Putnam and southern Dutchess counties. From NY 44 in Dutchess County to NY 82 in Columbia County the parkway retains its original reinforced concrete road surface, though asphalt overlay is commonly used to patch degraded concrete.

#### Curbs

The original parkway curbs of the late 1920s and 1930s were cast-in-place vertical barrier curbs.<sup>4</sup> In post-war construction north of NY 55, a special fluted, cast-in-place mountable and reflective concrete curb was introduced. Painted with a metallic white paint, curbs help to define the edge of the road visually while also providing a measure of safety. Curbs discourage drivers from pulling off to the side of the road and help to channel rainwater into roadside catch basins. On the TSP, the curbs are also an important design element. They express the formal connection between the parkway and park entrances, overlooks and interchanges. At intersections with local roads at-grade, curbs are interrupted, indicating the informal relationship between local roads and the parkway. Where asphalt has been overlaid on the original concrete road, the fluted, mountable curbs are visible only in remnant patches at the road's edge. In northern Dutchess County and through all of Columbia County the TSP's distinctive curb remains almost entirely intact. In recent reconstruction projects the historic curb design has been replicated in an effort to maintain stylistic continuity in these prominent, character-defining roadside features.

#### Drainage System

The TSP was designed with a closed drainage system with special features to keep water from collecting, or "ponding," on the road. Rainwater drains from a crowned roadbed to grated catch basins at the curb. Water is also channeled from a centralized trench in the median to

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<sup>4</sup> A field survey in 1999 revealed that at least one section of original curb was a non-integral barrier concrete curb. It is not known if this an anomaly or if other sections of 1930s curb also evince this variation.

underground ceramic or cast-iron pipes, which release the water through ashlar and random rubble rusticated stone headwalls. The original parkway design featured catch basins at the edge of the right lane, adjacent to 8'-0" turf shoulders. In reconstructed sections, particularly in Westchester and Putnam counties, these drainage inlets have been moved out of the driving lane and set in 8'-0" asphalt shoulders at the road's edge. From NY 44 to the parkway's terminus at I-90, catch basins are located in their original position.

#### Service Stations and Rest Areas

The TSP originally featured eight service stations and six overlook rest areas. Only two service stations and three overlook parking areas (one of which is closed) remain. These parkway amenities enhanced the comfort of pleasure driving, allowing travelers to stop, gas up and have a snack. All but two parkway service stations have been removed. Shenandoah service station, in East Fishkill, was built in 1942. Its location in the parkway median allows access and egress from both the northbound and southbound drives. The ground level is constructed of rough-cut stone masonry and the upper story is sided with wood shingles. A slate-tiled gable roof adds to the building's rustic character and evokes regional building traditions. The other remaining service station, at Todd Hill Road, is a two-story wood-frame structure with an overhanging gambrel roof. Dormers and mullioned windows, as well as wood shingle siding painted white, contribute to its Dutch Colonial appearance. The Todd Hill service station is now closed and its parking area is used as a commuter park-and-ride stop.

The service station at Briarcliff Wells in Westchester County (built in 1932 but no longer extant) was the most sumptuously designed and appointed. Its rustic wood and stone siding was surmounted by a slate-tiled cross-gable roof. Copper gutters and elegant interior moldings adopted traditional Hudson Valley architectural motifs. The Briarcliff Wells station featured a full service restaurant as well as a garage and gas station. Other service stations, at Kitchawan Road, Shrub Oak, Fahnestock Park, Clinton Corners and Lake Taghkanic, included such architectural details as rustic stone-clad gas pumps, carved wooden signs and peeled timber lampposts. These buildings and associated facilities were removed.

Parkway rest areas without service stations were also designed to conform to the project's overall aesthetic and intent. Overlook rest areas were located where especially dramatic views could be enjoyed at leisure. All but two overlooks were oriented to the west to present views of the Hudson River Valley and Catskill Mountains. Two overlook areas in the southern section, where parkway lanes were originally undivided, were constructed west of the parkway, adjacent to the southbound lanes. In northern Dutchess and Columbia counties, where the parkway was built with separated lanes, two pullouts were constructed at each overlook area, east of the road to serve northbound traffic and west of the road to accommodate southbound travelers. Four overlooks remain. The overlook at Putnam Valley once provided a panoramic view of its namesake feature but is currently closed, its view interrupted by overgrown vegetation. The overlook at Pumpkin Lane, also closed, took in an expansive agricultural landscape to the east. This view is now overgrown as well. Parking areas at two locations in Columbia County provide sweeping western views over the Hudson River Valley to the Catskill Mountain range. Designed to meld into the parkway corridor, overlooks feature continuous curbing and low stonewalls

edging the parking area. An occasional picnic table invites visitors to enjoy the view and to rest on long drives. The Hosmer Mountain overlook, looking west near Miller Hill Road in southern Dutchess County, has been removed, as has the Mohansic Lake overlook in Westchester County.

#### Maintenance Areas

Between Putnam County and its northern terminus at I-90, the parkway is served by three maintenance complexes. These are located within the right-of-way and can be glimpsed from the parkway's drives, though they are sited at greater distances from the road than features such as service stations and overlooks. The maintenance areas include reload yards, multiple-bay garages and attendant residences. The complex at CR 301 in Putnam County is within the boundaries of Fahnestock State Park. Buildings are constructed of brick and wood and embody a rustic design aesthetic similar to other park facilities. Those at Hibernia Road in Dutchess County and NY 23 in Columbia County are nearly identical. Both were apparently constructed in the 1950s or 60s. Long L-shaped buildings divided into garage bays define service yards, while residences are sited at adjacent but slightly removed locations. All components are of red brick with wood trim and metal windows. The one-story residences are small and simple in form and display extremely modest Colonial Revival design motifs. All three facilities are still used in parkway maintenance activities.

Parkway master plans also indicate the locations of several other "service garages." None of these buildings survive and their designs and functions are not known. In 1998, the ruins of a small building of rustic stone construction with a gable roof supported by massive log rafters were identified in the right-of-way just north of the Bear Mountain Parkway. This design aesthetic is similar to that of other structures constructed in New York State parks in the 1920s and 30s. The building was apparently divided into a single garage bay and one narrow pedestrian bay. The remains of this building were removed by the summer of 1999.

#### Guiderails

A variety of guiderail systems are used on the parkway, ranging from galvanized steel W- and box-beam barriers, to a Cor-ten steel post and beam system, to cable guiderails on steel posts. Oxidizing Cor-ten steel box beam guiderails are the most frequent type. They provide both safety and a degree of rustic character. The brown-colored Cor-ten steel is designed to imitate the wooden post and rail system originally used. Guiderails are used on narrow medians and along cut and fill sections. The original wooden guiderail system was removed in the early 1960s to be replaced with the current system. Wooden guiderail posts can be observed in deteriorated fragments at several locations, including several posts and rails visible at the NY 199 interchange.

#### Signage

Signage on the TSP includes directional and regulatory signs, at-grade crossing signs, service signs, and interpretive signs. Reflective green and white highway signs provide information such as exit names and route numbers. These signs are usually mounted at the side of the road; they are occasionally mounted overhead in places where sight lines are limited. Regulatory signage includes black-on-white speed limit signs, no U-turn signs and no parking signs. Several

cast-metal interpretive signs at overlooks provide basic historical information about the region. At the Bullet Hole Road overlook, a small metal plaque commemorates the inauguration of construction in Putnam County by Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1931. Yellow hazard signs and blue and white service signs are also located at the roadside. The TSP green and white logo sign announces the parkway at interchanges. "Pleasure Vehicles Only" signs often accompany the TSP logo signs at parkway entrances. At-grade intersection signs indicate the local street or road the parkway intersects and are smaller than other parkway signage. They are painted a reflective green color with white lettering and are placed adjacent to intersecting streets. Historic photographs record wooden posts with signs hanging from steel or wrought-iron chains. Signage was originally designed with yellow letters on a green field. None of the signs on the parkway is original, though a number of the original signposts and pieces of hardware survive.

### Parks

As a scenic pleasure drive planned as part of a wider regional transportation system for recreational travelers, the TSP links the metropolitan region with a system of state parks in the east Hudson Valley. Several smaller picnic areas were originally developed within the parkway right-of-way. Hunter Brook, Kitchawan Woods and Echo Lake picnic areas in Westchester and Putnam counties were small pockets of scenic woodlands featuring picnic tables, barbecue pits and comfort stations.

The state parks linked by the parkway have grown into heavily visited recreation areas serving both local residents and citizens of greater New York City. FDR State Park (formerly Mohansic Park) is the southernmost park in the Taconic Region. Park visitors enjoy direct access from the parkway interchange. The park contains 557 acres of picnic grounds, playing fields, and wooded areas. A large swimming pool and bathhouse complex designed in the mid-1950s by the distinguished New York-based architectural and engineering firm Skidmore, Owings & Merrill is the park's central attraction for its many summer visitors.

In Putnam County the parkway enters Clarence Fahnestock Memorial State Park. Parkway access is accomplished via a grade-separated interchange at NY 301 in the town of Kent. Fahnestock Park, which is crossed by the Appalachian Trail, encompasses more than 4,400 acres of hardwood forests, pine groves and several ponds and small lakes. Within the park's boundaries, relics of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century mining industry may be observed in old forges and furnaces, remnant stonewalls, and abandoned roads. A large sandy beach at Canopus Lake is a popular swimming spot. A system of cross-country ski trails invites winter sports enthusiasts to explore the park's extensive backcountry.

In Dutchess County, the parkway enters James Baird State Park in the town of LaGrange. Baird's 583 acres encompass hardwood forests and open fields and is a popular day-use park for Dutchess County residents. A golf course designed in 1946 by Robert Trent Jones distinguishes it from the many public and private courses in the county.

Two Columbia County parks complete the system of state parks along the Taconic State Parkway corridor. Lake Taghkanic State Park is directly accessible via a parkway exit and

encompasses 1,569 acres in the towns of Ancram and Taghkanic. At the center of the park is a natural lake with swimming beaches and boat ramps. Campsites and rental cabins are available near the lakeshore.

Taconic State Park is located northeast of Lake Taghkanic, approximately 15 miles east of the parkway exit at NY 23. Taconic State Park provides access, through a series of hiking trails from Rudd and Ore Pit ponds, to the popular Bash Bish Falls, just over the Massachusetts border. Taconic State Park is the largest park in the Taconic region, encompassing 6,000 acres. This park was originally planned as a component of a proposed Tri-State Park, to include land in New York, Connecticut and Massachusetts, and it was originally intended to be the northeastern terminus of the TSP. Another parkway would continue due north towards the Canadian border. Plans for a direct connection to the TSP were never realized and neither the Tri-State Park nor the northern spur was completed as planned.

## BEGINNINGS OF THE NEW YORK STATE PARK SYSTEM

The development of the Taconic State Parkway was part of a broad program of recreation, preservation, and transportation efforts undertaken by a variety of governmental agencies with roots dating back to the late nineteenth century. Prompted by a complex mixture of social and environmental factors, state, county, and municipal authorities participated in park development projects of varying scale and influence. While municipal and countywide park development remained a prominent concern, the development of a coordinated statewide park plan became an increasingly prominent concern in the early decades of the twentieth century. The principles established during this period served to guide New York's public recreation program over the rest of the twentieth century and played a key role in the development of Taconic State Parkway.

New York's involvement with state parks stemmed from the great changes in demographics and land use that began to alter the landscape of the state after the Civil War. The rapid growth of industries that depleted natural resources, compounded by a decline in the viability of agricultural lands, the transition to an industrial society, and the movement of the rural population to the cities produced a surplus of idle and unproductive farmland, denuded forests, and overcrowded urban populations. The first large-scale state conservation activities focused primarily on economic needs rather than broader social concerns and were devoted to reestablishing forest preserves and protecting watersheds.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, the state's acquisition of endangered lands and the subsequent acknowledgment that these preserves should be accessible to the public set precedents for New York's twentieth-century efforts to provide public parkland for its citizens.

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<sup>5</sup> Alexander MacDonald, New York State Conservation Commissioner, in *Proceedings of the Second National Conference on State Parks, Bear Mountain, New York, May 23-25, 1922*, ed. Henry R. Francis (n.p., 1923), 3.

The emphasis on creating state-owned parks for recreational as well conservation purposes received a tremendous boost with the development of Palisades Interstate Park, which catered to residents of New York City but was located outside the metropolis's boundaries on the opposite shore of the Hudson River. The towering escarpment known as the Palisades stretched for fourteen miles along the Hudson River between Fort Lee, New Jersey and Piermont, just over the New York State line. Although the cliffs had been quarried since the mid-nineteenth century, greater New York's rapid growth precipitated an enormous increase in the demand for trap rock, which provided an especially desirable ingredient of concrete, then in great demand for skyscrapers and roads.<sup>6</sup> As damage to the escarpment became more apparent, public opposition to quarrying intensified.

Although several attempts at protecting the cliffs were initiated, lasting conservation of the Palisades did not become feasible until the creation of the Palisades Interstate Park Commission (PIPC) in 1900. The PIPC was an unusual joint venture by New York and New Jersey, which cooperated to acquire the Palisades for their mutual benefit. The commission's initial purview was the narrow stretch of land from the top of the cliffs to the shore. As Franklin W. Hopkins, commission vice president, recalled in 1922, "nobody had any idea of making a park at all . . . the object was to preserve the scenic view of the Palisades."<sup>7</sup> As the quarries disbanded, the commission found itself struggling to provide public access to the previously inaccessible shoreline areas at the base of the cliffs. Because existing ferries could not meet the demand, the PIPC developed its own transportation department and worked with local and state agencies to improve regional transportation systems. Thus began a link between recreational development and transportation planning that was to influence every facet of New York State's park planning program for the next seventy years.

The Palisades Interstate Park was phenomenally successful. The initial preserve of cliff and shoreline in New Jersey was augmented by the Harriman family's donation of 10,000 acres inland, northwest of the cliffs in 1910. These two sections formed the core of the interstate park, which grew to nearly 60,000 acres over the next forty years. The Palisades Interstate Park's substantial size, influential design features, and progressive social programs served as a model for other parks in New York, similar developments in other states, and even national parks. In New York it was the keystone of the state park system, establishing a number important precedents for state park planning.

One of the things that ensured the immediate success of the Palisades Interstate Park was its proximity to an enormous and eager clientele. Although New York City residents were fortunate in that a significant amount of urban land had been set aside for public benefit, even amenities as large and progressive as Olmsted's Central Park (840 acres, 1857-73) and Prospect Park (526 acres, 1865) could not provide adequate recreational opportunities for the city's early twentieth-

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<sup>6</sup> Palisades Interstate Park Commission, *60 Years of Cooperation: History of the Palisades Interstate Park* (Bear Mt., New York: PIPC, 1960), 17.

<sup>7</sup> Franklin W. Hopkins, in *Proceedings*, 21-22.

century population, which topped 5 million in 1920.<sup>8</sup> The relative proximity of rural and/or undeveloped areas in the Hudson Valley to the north and Long Island to the east contributed to the emergence of two important regional trends: the permanent migration to suburban residential communities and the expansion of opportunities for urbanites to visit the country on a temporary basis for recreation and relaxation. The rapid pace of early twentieth-century suburban growth fostered an interest in regional planning and led to the development of recreation and transportation networks in Westchester and Nassau counties. Likewise, the demand for accessible recreation was reflected in the state's plans to connect each of the state's major urban populations with strategically located parks. This goal became a key principle of the state park plan, justifying the state's role in developing recreational roads and parkways along with its involvement in regional transportation planning.

Another fundamental tenet of New York's state park program that originated in the Palisades Interstate Park project was that the state should establish programs to promote and facilitate public recreation. Among the PIPC's most influential programs was its large-scale organized group camping for the underprivileged. Beginning in 1913, the camp program (which continues in operation today) provided hundreds of thousands of inner city children with an opportunity to experience nature. Although group camping was not repeated on this scale in other state parks, the idea that the state should provide therapeutic recreational opportunities remained in force throughout the twentieth century. Adopting this Progressive Era mandate also helped to effect the expansion of the state's role in conservation activity, from protecting straightforward public health and economic interests to promoting social improvement.

The development of Palisades Interstate Park and similar public reservations was facilitated by a tradition of public-private cooperation established between the state governments of New York and New Jersey and some of the wealthiest families in the lower Hudson Valley. Various Rockefellers, Harrimans, Morgans, Vanderbilts, Bakers, and Perkins contributed significant amounts of land and money, along with considerable personal time and expertise, toward the development of conservation and recreation facilities administered by these states and by municipal and county governments as well. Among the Palisades Interstate Park's most important benefactors was George Perkins Marsh, Sr. (1862-1920), who served as the park commission's first president from 1900-1920. A financier by trade, Perkins's initial contribution was his fundraising ability. His involvement in park planning and administration grew over the years, and he soon gained a national reputation in recreation planning circles. Perkins was one of the many prominent citizens who played major roles in promoting, supporting and administering New York's state parks over the next century. Although generally not trained in conservation, planning, or landscape design, these individuals found themselves at the forefront of a growing state park movement, in which New York played a leading role. Perkins was one of the most influential members of this group, and has been credited with initiating the actions that led to the development of the New York state park plan.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Robert A. Caro, *The Powerbroker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (New York: Knopf, 1974), 143.

<sup>9</sup> Although Perkins died in 1920, the Committee on the State Park Plan credited him with the idea for the comprehensive study of New York State's park needs, initiated shortly before his death, that culminated in the state park

## A STATE PARK PLAN FOR NEW YORK

The first comprehensive survey of state park needs was undertaken during the late 1910s and early 1920s, culminating in 1922 with the publication of *A State Park Plan for New York*.<sup>10</sup> While this plan became one of the most important documents of the state park movement, the study actually began as a mere sub-component of a comprehensive effort to reform state government. In 1918 Governor-elect Alfred E. Smith appointed a Commission for the Reconstruction, Retrenchment and Reorganization of State Government. Smith charged the commission with drawing up a comprehensive plan to reorganize state administration and implement numerous social reforms. Robert Moses was appointed the commission's chief of staff and played a leading role in drafting the commission's report.<sup>11</sup> Moses also served as secretary of a new statewide advocacy group, the New York State Association, which became an outspoken and effective agent for the reform agenda.<sup>12</sup> Moses would go on to play a pivotal role in New York's park, parkway, and transportation planning for the next half century.

The New York State Association established eight special committees to pursue different aspects of the reform program. One of the largest was the Committee on the State Park Plan, whose members brought to their task a wealth of experience in park, recreation, and conservation issues. Chaired by Madison Grant, one of the original commissioners of the Bronx Parkway Commission, the committee included engineers Jay Downer, renowned for his work on the Bronx River Parkway, and William A. Welch, who as chief engineer for the PIPC was already a national leader in the state park and scenic road movement.<sup>13</sup> In the first few years, the committee's roster also listed nationally prominent planner Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. Other members included some of the state's most influential park benefactors, many of whom had already made important contributions to the state's conservation and recreation programs.

While New York was one of the first states to develop a comprehensive park planning document, the 1922 effort embodied ideas about recreational planning that were being explored across the country. It drew upon Progressive ideals, economic arguments, and public relations skills to make the case for a development program that appeared to offer immense public benefits with little public risk. The document set out the administrative precedents for the park program and affirmed the state's responsibility to protect natural resources and ensure the health and welfare of citizens. While asserting the benefits of centralized park planning, the report emphasized that the administration and expenditure of funds would be diffused at the local level. Although Robert Moses is often given credit for the plan, the experienced park planners on the commission such as Perkins, Grant, Welch, Downer and Olmsted undoubtedly influenced the shape and

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plan. See Forward to New York State Association, Committee on the State Park Plan, *A State Park Plan for New York* (n.p., 1922; revised and updated, 1924).

<sup>10</sup> New York State Association, *A State Park Plan for New York* (n.p., 1922; revised and updated, 1924).

<sup>11</sup> This four-hundred page opus, *Report of the Reconstruction Commission to Governor Alfred E. Smith on Retrenchment and Reorganization in the State Government*, published in 1919, was widely regarded as embodying the major tenets of Progressive thought in the United States (Caro, *The Powerbroker*, 104).

<sup>12</sup> Caro, *The Powerbroker*, 260.

<sup>13</sup> New York State Association, *State Bulletin* (17 January 1922).

scope of the report. Moses' key contribution was his ability to assemble the political and legal mechanisms to implement the report's recommendations. By ensuring that park planning was incorporated into the larger reform agenda, Moses took what was generally perceived as a private, local, or philanthropic activity and transformed it into an official function of state government. Subsequent legislative and gubernatorial endorsement for a statewide park program legitimized it within the state's long-term planning and budgetary process and ensured that parks would have a permanent place in the state government structure.

The proposals contained within the state park plan reflected the influence of a major transportation revolution that was transforming America. In 1900, when the PIPC was established, there were only 8,000 cars registered in the United States; by 1920, there were more than 8 million. During the 1920s, the number of automobiles in the nation climbed to 26.5 million. By end of the decade, the car had almost become a middle-class necessity.<sup>14</sup> As cars made remote recreational objectives accessible, the state's commitment to automobile-accessible parks increased. Motoring itself became a planned recreational experience, and the development of parkways and scenic highways became a priority for park planners.

The heart of the state park plan was a detailed outline for a proposed statewide system of parks connected by parkways and boulevards. For each region the report noted existing parks, analyzed regional needs, and proposed new facilities. The authors used photographs, maps, and effusive prose to create tantalizing images of the new parks planned for development. As they described scenery, climate, views, topography and other features, the authors appealed to the sensibilities of local voters, who were encouraged to imagine themselves enjoying these appealing environments, rendered secure and accessible by state park planners.<sup>15</sup>

Funds to initiate the park plan were to be raised through a \$15 million bond, which was a substantial increase over previous state park expenditures. Through the aegis of the New York State Association, however, the proposed park plan and bond received a substantial amount of publicity and garnered widespread popular support. In 1924, with the bond still to come before the voters, the original plan was enlarged, revised and republished. The revised plan recommended that a permanent state parks council be created within the Conservation Department to implement the park program. The plan was expanded to include new regions and new projects. The revised plan also reported on the tangible progress that had been made over the past two years in acquiring and developing parks, suggesting that an ambitious state park plan was not only desirable, but that development was well underway, bringing immediate benefits to citizens. The state legislature approved the plan and, when put to the voters in 1924, the bond issue passed by more than 1 million votes, one of the largest majorities on record.

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<sup>14</sup> Tom Lewis, *Divided Highways: Building the Interstate Highways, Transforming American Life* (New York: Viking, 1997), 20-21; Chester Liebs, *Mainstreet to Miracle Mile: American Roadside Architecture* (Boston: Little Brown, 1985), 17.

<sup>15</sup> The chapter on the Allegany Region, for example, described the spectacular natural advantages of the proposed 65,000-acre wilderness preserve, outlined a system of roads, trails and camping facilities, and guided the reader on a journey along the scenic highway planned to traverse the park.

## NEW YORK STATE COUNCIL OF PARKS

The administration and development of the state park plan was entrusted to the State Council of Parks (SCP). Legislation authorizing the council was signed into law on 18 April 1924.<sup>16</sup> As recommended in the 1924 plan, the new council was to be an advisory board within the Conservation Commission. Members would represent each regional park commission and other appropriate agencies. The council would establish official state park policy, coordinate regional management plans, and prepare and submit an itemized parks budget to the legislature. The first council included representatives from each of five previously established park commissions (Palisades Interstate, Allegany, Niagara Reservation, American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society, and Westchester County) and two new ones (Finger Lakes and Long Island), as well as the conservation commissioner, the director of the state museum and an executive secretary. In 1925, the council was expanded with the creation of three additional regional park commissions: Central, Taconic, and Erie County.<sup>17</sup>

The SCP outlined its goals and methods in a 1925 report titled, the "Principles of State Park Planning as Applied to New York." In the introduction, the authors described the physical character and land-use patterns of the state and placed these developments within the context of twentieth-century trends. Paired with this was information on relevant social phenomena such as demographic trends, anticipated population growth, agricultural decline, and the changes in lifestyle engendered by the automobile. As industrialization grew and agriculture declined, the report detailed, the rural population began to migrate to the central corridor, resulting in crowded urban areas and larger areas of unproductive rural land. At the same time, the automobile greatly decreased travel time and precipitated changes such as urban expansion and suburban development, both of which threatened encroachment on surrounding rural and scenic areas. The council suggested that public acquisition of these areas would protect them while providing recreational outlets for needy urban citizens. Given the rapid pace of twentieth-century changes, it seemed apparent that the greatest danger would be failing to address land-use planning at all.

The State Council of Parks proposed that underused lands be acquired at low cost, regional scenic character be preserved and enhanced, and urban populations be provided with efficient ways to visit and enjoy rural and scenic areas. The plan considered factors such as where to locate park facilities in relation to cities and scenic features, what land was most available and most threatened, what the best use of the land was in relation to its character, and how to ensure that enough land was reserved for a balanced array of uses in the future.<sup>18</sup> Because the program's success depended almost entirely on the ability of state residents to travel easily between different types of land uses, the plan had to address transportation as much as it did recreation and conservation. From the start, park planners recognized that they would have to develop roads to provide access to regional scenery and recreational areas. They realized that it would be ideal if these transportation networks could serve as parks in and of themselves.

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<sup>16</sup> Chapter 189, Laws of 1924.

<sup>17</sup> Chapter 198, Laws of 1925.

<sup>18</sup> New York State Council of Parks, "The Principles of State Park Planning as Applied to New York," in *First Annual Report to the Governor and the Legislature of the State of New York* (n.p., 1925), 10-12.

Scenic roads and multi-purpose parkways had great potential to expand recreational opportunities for citizens because relaxation and enjoyment could begin—and perhaps even end—with the trip itself.

In addition to laying out New York's park planning philosophy, the 1925 report outlined the council's specific plans for working within the state government structure, reinforcing the idea that the park program was a permanent part of state government. The council affirmed its commitment to an independent park program and pledged to work on additional enabling legislation.<sup>19</sup> In reading the council's report, two themes stand out: coordination and connections. These were the instruments that the council intended to use to achieve its goals. The council's enabling legislation specifically directed it to work with other state agencies and local governments. The council's ability to carry out its functions would depend to a large degree on its skill in establishing mutual goals and good working relationships with departments that might have missions substantially different from its own.

Perhaps no interaction would prove as important as that between park planners and the state highway department. The council's report incorporated a section spelling out the "Relationship of State Park and Parkway Programs to Highway Program." This eleven-point declaration spelled out the council's parkway proposals and proclaimed its intention to add parkways and indicate park routes on the official state park map. Of particular interest was the council's intent to connect every region of the state, even those in which no parks had been planned, via a system of improved and scenic highways. The report referred the highway matter to the Sub-Committee on Park Laws and directed a committee to prepare a plan for the classification of highways by use. The latter was one of the most important recommendations of contemporary regional planners, and it indicates the expansive thinking that informed New York's state park plan.<sup>20</sup>

## PARKWAY PRECEDENTS

By the time the New York State Association's Committee on the State Park Plan was formed in 1921, New York was leading the nation in the development and construction of scenic automobile parkways. Carrying out a proposal suggested as early as 1896, the Bronx Parkway Commission was nearing completion of a 15-mile limited-access scenic automobile parkway extending from the Bronx, at the northeastern tip of New York City, through the center of Westchester, one of New York State's most rapidly developing suburban counties.<sup>21</sup> The Bronx River Parkway, widely acknowledged as the first modern motor parkway, extended ideas developed by Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. during the late nineteenth century into the automobile age.

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<sup>19</sup> SCP, *First Annual Report*, 17-21; 35-36.

<sup>20</sup> SCP, *First Annual Report*, 32-33.

<sup>21</sup> Jay Downer and James Owens, *Public Parks in Westchester County* (reprinted from *History of Westchester County, New York*, ed. Alvah P. French [New York: Lewis, 1925]), 3.

The landscaped carriage drives that Olmsted and his partner Calvert Vaux laid out in Brooklyn (Eastern and Ocean Parkways) in the 1860s and 70s were conceived as attractive and efficient formal boulevards providing access to residential areas and urban parks.<sup>22</sup> In his work in Buffalo during the same period, Olmsted enlarged this construct to create a design for a citywide system of parks and boulevards. H.W.S. Cleveland's plans for park and parkway systems in Minneapolis and St. Paul (1883-85) and George Kessler's citywide system of parks and boulevards in Kansas City in the early 1920s relied on similar concepts. These and other projects helped demonstrate that designs for comprehensive transportation and recreation systems could be successfully integrated into city planning activity.

The next stage in the evolution of the American parkway was to expand the idea of coordinated park and parkway systems beyond the boundaries of a single city to encompass a broader framework that crossed jurisdictional lines to address the needs of rapidly growing metropolitan regions. In the early 1890s, landscape architect Charles Eliot began to promote the idea of a metropolitan park district encompassing twelve cities and twenty-four towns within a 10-mile radius of Boston. He argued for the creation of a commission that could act independently of the various local authorities to develop a plan that would benefit the entire district. Eliot's proposal led to the creation of the Metropolitan Park Commission in 1893 and the subsequent development of the first metropolitan park system in America.<sup>23</sup> In the early 1920s, the idea of comprehensive park planning was expanded to a still larger scale in New York's grand plan for a statewide system of parks and parkways.

Concurrently, the first limited-access automobile parkways extrapolated Olmsted's nineteenth-century concepts for urban carriage drives to accommodate faster speeds and greater distances. A key principle of the automobile parkway was derived from Olmsted and Vaux's development of grade-separated carriage drives and pedestrian walks for Central Park in 1858. Designing roads to accommodate traffic at different grades minimized interruptions, allowed the separation of traffic by type and restricted entrance and exit to carefully planned and regularly spaced interchanges. In effecting as uninterrupted a drive as possible, automobile parkways substantially increased the range of conservation, recreation, and planning objectives that could be addressed. Perhaps most significant, they greatly enhanced the ability to link middle-class residents (those with cars and leisure time) of congested urban areas with parks, preserves, and undeveloped rural scenery. As urban areas became increasingly less desirable places to live, automobile and road building technology improved, encouraging middle- and upper-class urbanites to forge more permanent connections between the city and the idealized environments outside it.

Parkways, sometimes described as "linear parks," are often perceived primarily in a recreational context. While this characterization is true, the development of the parkway form took a slightly more circuitous route from problem to solution and then from solution to effect. Although more

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<sup>22</sup> Albert Fein, *Frederick Law Olmsted and the American Environmental Tradition* (New York: Braziller, 1972), 32.

<sup>23</sup> Norman T. Newton, *Design on the Land: The Development of Landscape Architecture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 323.

localized, the late nineteenth century pollution of the Bronx River was a problem comparable to the destruction of the Palisades. In both cases, natural resources were threatened as the result of rapid growth and industrialization, and both situations were brought to public attention by concerned citizens who were prominent members of society. Rapid and unplanned development had substantially increased the flow of sewage and industrial wastes into the 30-mile-long Bronx River, a north-south waterway through the center of the Westchester County. Although the pollution problem raised significant concerns about public health, the incentive to take action also had a slightly less than altruistic side, involving the desire of some upper-class citizens to displace what they regarded as "unsightly" development along the river banks. This term included low-income housing, billboards, and a variety of commercial and industrial enterprises. The issue came to a head because the southern end of the river ran past the New York Zoological Society and the Bronx Botanical Gardens, both of which had board members who were involved in conservation issues.

The first official action was a commission authorized by the state legislature in 1895 "to inquire into the expediency of constructing a sewer and highway . . . along the Bronx River."<sup>24</sup> This commission undertook a detailed survey and recommended construction of a sewer but dismissed the idea of a park and highway. The Bronx River Sewer Commission failed to complete even this limited sanitation project, and in 1906 the legislature authorized a second commission to investigate reclaiming and preserving the river. The 1906 commission consisted of Madison Grant, Dave H. Morris and James G. Gannon; William White Niles served as secretary and J. Warren Thatcher as engineer. This commission had the strong support of the New York Zoological Society, as Grant was one of its founders and Niles was a member of its executive committee. Grant (1865-1937) was a lawyer with a strong interest in zoology and conservation. He was a founder of the New York Zoological Society (1925), the Natural Park Association of Washington, and the Save the Redwoods League; he also played an important role as an early chair of the New York State Committee on the State Park Plan.<sup>25</sup> Niles (1860-1935) was a prominent attorney and a member of the New York State Assembly (1896); he served on several commissions involved with government reform. Niles assumed such an influential role in the development of the parkway that his obituary referred to him as "father" of the Bronx River Parkway.<sup>26</sup> Later, both Grant and Niles became active members of the Taconic State Park Commission.

The Bronx Parkway Commission concluded that the only effective way to protect the river was to acquire it, recommending that lands along its shores be developed as a preserve (or a "river

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<sup>24</sup> Downer and Owens, *Public Parks*, 1.

<sup>25</sup> Editor's note: Grant was also an outspoken Nativist and eugenicist, who believed immigration from southern and central Europe was debilitating America's racial stock and cultural values. He authored a number of racist screeds including *The Passing of the Great Race, Or the Racial Basis of European History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916); *The Alien in Our Midst: or "Selling Our Birthright for A Mess of Pottage"* (New York: The Galton Publishing Company, 1930). Taken in this light, his determination to replace working class Italian settlements along the Bronx River with a depopulated landscape devoted to leisure, recreation, real estate enhancement, and the celebration of the Anglo-American picturesque ideal had broader and less altruistic cultural implications.

<sup>26</sup> "W.W. Niles Dies," *New York Times*, 31 January 1935.

reservation," as it was termed). The committee's report cited the potential for public benefit based on observations of similar projects in other cities and directly addressed the recreational advantages of a park and boulevard along the river.<sup>27</sup>

The committee received authorization to proceed by state legislation in 1907, and Grant, Niles and Gannon were appointed as commissioners. The Bronx Parkway Commission was jointly funded by New York City and Westchester County. The city was required to make a larger contribution because planners anticipated that its citizens would receive the greater benefit. The commission set about acquiring land immediately, both by purchase and donation, addressing sanitary concerns on individual parcels as soon as titles were cleared. As pollution control features were constructed, the river was re-routed and dams were built to create lakes, ponds and waterfalls. At the same time, the land within the reservation (which eventually included more than 1,000 acres) was reclaimed, meadows and forests were established, and recreational features (parks, walks, trails, rustic bridges, etc.) were sited to enhance scenic views and vistas.

Preliminary work on the parkway drive did not begin until the appointment of Jay Downer as chief engineer in 1912. Downer (1877-1949) had studied engineering at Princeton. Previous to his Westchester appointment, he had worked for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and for several railroads. Upon completion of the Bronx River Parkway, Downer became chief engineer for the Westchester County Park Commission, overseeing development of the countywide system until 1934. He served on the Committee on the State Park Plan and represented the Westchester County Park Commission on the State Council of Parks. Downer was widely respected throughout the country and became one of the most influential members of the State Council of Parks. During his service to the council in its formative years, Downer was involved in almost every administrative and programmatic decision concerning the fledgling park system. Downer's influence was so pervasive that in 1928, Taconic State Park Commissioner Francis R. Masters confided to TSPC Chair Franklin D. Roosevelt that "the Park Council [wa]s dominated by three men—Moses, Downer, and Welch."<sup>28</sup>

In his history (coauthored by James Owens) of the Westchester County Park Commission, *Public Parks in Westchester County*, Downer described the original purpose of the Bronx parkway as reclaiming and preserving the river and protecting New York City's parklands. He noted that its secondary purpose, "to provide a parked driveway outlet for New York City's tens of thousands of pleasure cars which on Sundays and holidays congest all of Westchester County's highways," became increasingly more important as construction proceeded.<sup>29</sup> Downer's description of the sequence of the needs, actions and effects that contributed to the development of the Bronx River Parkway parallels those that culminated in the development of the New York state park and parkway system. As Downer observed, the project's original intent was strictly conservation-oriented. Public ownership and control of endangered land was to be the chief method of protecting it. Subsequently, a recreational feature, the pleasure drive, was developed within the

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<sup>27</sup> Downer and Owens, *Public Parks*, 4.

<sup>28</sup> Francis R. Masters to Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 25 July 1928, letter, President's Personal File, Container 34, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, NY (hereafter FDRL).

<sup>29</sup> Downer and Owens, *Public Parks*, 10.

preserve, taking advantage of the newly reclaimed natural area. The scenic drive itself was defined as a conservation feature, providing the public with access to protected land while strictly controlling use. As increasing attention was given to the route of the road and its location within the landscape, the act of driving became the way that conservation became linked with recreation, particularly for the urban population. With the car providing a new way to move between city and country, parkways also became important in facilitating inter-regional transportation and preserving parkland amidst rapidly growing areas. Combining conservation, recreation, transportation, and planning concerns, the Bronx River Parkway successfully achieved many of the goals that proved important in the development of the New York state parks and parkways system and played a central role in the planning and development of the Taconic State Parkway.

Actual construction of the Bronx River Parkway began in 1917. Interrupted by World War I and post-war shortages of materials, the road was not completed until 1924. The development of the parkway was a collaborative process, involving a group of conservationists, citizens, engineers, and landscape architects, who, individually and together, contributed the significant ideas that became the hallmarks of the scenic automobile parkway. Certainly the various engineers and commission members who had guided the conception, planning and design of the project since the 1890s deserved substantial credit for formulating the idea for the reservation and parkway; as chief engineer, Downer's influence in supervising design and construction was substantial. Although a number of commission staff made important contributions to the design, Downer credited engineers Leslie G. Holleran, C.A. Garfield, James Owens and Arthur G. Hayden and landscape architects and foresters Hermann W. Merkel, Gilmore D. Clarke, Albert N. Robson and Walter H. Boyce as the principal members of the engineering and design staff. Several of these individuals went on to make significant contributions to the planning or design of other components of the New York park system and/or to design other roads, bridges, and parks throughout the nation. Downer also noted the contributions of consulting architects and engineers, legal staff, appraisers, and city and county agencies.<sup>30</sup> As Downer's acknowledgements suggest, the Bronx River Parkway was the product of an interdisciplinary collaborative design process. Such a wide array of talent and experience was brought to bear on this premier parkway design that it invites the suggestion that only such a group could have produced a resource that was successful in so many contexts. Many of the parkways that followed could attribute their success to a similar collaboration of talents.

The design of the Bronx River Parkway defined the limited-access scenic automobile parkway type and set the precedent for many thousands of miles of scenic roads built in America over the next forty years, including its northern extension, the Taconic State Parkway. As multi-faceted as its design team, the parkway embodied a combination of planning, engineering and landscape components that together defined a new and innovative resource type. Among the noteworthy planning aspects of the project were that it combined conservation, recreation and transportation goals, provided a new kind of recreational connection between city and country, offered a model for segregating traffic by function, preserved open spaces amidst rapid development, and

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<sup>30</sup> Downer and Owens, *Public Parks*, 16.

demonstrated the potential for increased property values associated with parkway development. Although all of these concepts had been explored in nineteenth-century designs, the plan of the Bronx River Parkway was successful in combining them in a contemporary scheme designed to accommodate the fairly new and not yet ubiquitous single-family automobile. At the same time, the comprehensive planning and design process upgraded the quality of automobile travel, making the experience of driving inherently more relaxing and enhancing the motorist's ability to appreciate the surrounding scenery. Among the design components that helped to transform the road into a recreational feature were a uniform roadway with controlled access, limited cross traffic, consistent speed, smooth driving surfaces, gentle grading, and the elimination of sharp curves and boring straightaways. Separated driving lanes, a feature employed on one or two short sections of the Bronx River Parkway, became one of the most desired components of later parkways, though economic concerns often prevented their implementation.

Finally, public acquisition and control of a substantial right-of-way allowed landscape designers the freedom to plan an environment specifically intended to be experienced from the automobile. Because the motorist's point of view was determined by his or her relatively fixed position on the road *and* a continually changing location, planners created a design scheme best experienced by movement. Focusing on the river, designers relied on substantial reforestation efforts and the lavish use of native plants to restore the area's natural beauty. Within this contained and controlled environment, the crisply defined drive was laid out to follow a serpentine path following the natural topography, such that the driver both saw and felt the undulating landscape. A combination of indigenous and introduced plantings was used to create a picturesque frame for the roadway and a series of designed scenic enhancements, such as picturesque stone bridges and rustic pedestrian crossings, augmented tightly framed views. Finally, integrating the road with parks and other recreational features expanded the boundaries of the preserve and provided additional variety of view and experience. The result was a naturalistic landscape in the best tradition of Olmsted, a "garden" for the auto created by modifying and enhancing nature.

The Bronx River Parkway was not even completed before plans were afoot to extend a system of parks and parkways throughout Westchester County. The Westchester County Park Commission (WCPC) was authorized to provide for "the location, creation, acquisition and improvement of parks, parkways and boulevards in and by the County of Westchester."<sup>31</sup> The following year, on 1 February 1923, the commission hired Downer as chief engineer. Authorized to make a comprehensive survey as a basis for a general county park plan, Downer submitted his first recommendations almost immediately. Over the next two years, the county approved a series of projects initiating park development on a scale that Downer assessed as "probably unequalled by any other municipality in an equal period of time."<sup>32</sup> As soon as the Bronx River Parkway was completed in 1924, the Bronx Parkway Commission was terminated, and its maintenance was divided between New York City and the Westchester County Park Commission.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Westchester County Park Law, 1922, in Downer and Owens, *Public Parks*, 21.

<sup>32</sup> Downer and Owens, *Public Parks*, 23.

<sup>33</sup> Chapter 197, Laws of 1925.

The Westchester County park system was conceived as a series of recreational areas dispersed throughout the county and connected by boulevards or parkways. Following the model established by the Bronx River Parkway, new parkways were to follow the county's major north-south stream valleys. This would help protect the streams from pollution and facilitate the movement of traffic through the county, while presenting fewer challenges for road construction. Along these routes, parks or recreational features would be developed where appropriate. The system offered a diverse collection of features, including parks, beaches, picnic areas, trails, and bridle paths—even an amusement park. Because of the way the parks and parkways were dispersed throughout the county, they also preserved a reasonable amount of open land and scenery amidst rapidly developing residential areas. As Downer himself realized, the county program had "a much broader scope than the primary and designated purpose of providing public parks."<sup>34</sup> By the early 1920s parks and parkways had become important components of regional planning efforts.

Downer's account demonstrated the ongoing evolution of the parkway concept. He cited the growth of New York City, the increasing number of automobiles and the growing interest in outdoor recreation as key reasons for expanding the country's park and parkways systems. These had been important factors in the development of the Bronx River Parkway, but Downer suggested that there was a growing need to address the problem of rapid and unplanned suburban development by embracing even more comprehensive town and city planning. The Bronx River Parkway's success had strongly influenced public sentiment in favor of parkway development, but it also compounded and accelerated existing trends by increasing recreational and commuting traffic and helping to extend suburban settlement farther north.<sup>35</sup>

By 1924 the WCPC realized that its ambitious plan had been too modest. The county also recognized the need for prompt action to acquire land while it was still available and reasonably priced.<sup>36</sup> This was especially true in regard to parkway development, which required extensive land acquisition carried out in a coordinated and comprehensive fashion. Among the most important components of the WCPC's newly expanded plan were the Saw Mill River Parkway, which extended northeast from Van Cortlandt Park to Chappaqua (later to Katonah); the Hutchinson River Parkway, extending northeast from Pelham Bay Park to the Connecticut border and providing access to numerous reservoirs and lakes; and the Bronx Parkway Extension, continuing the original parkway to the Bear Mountain Bridge.<sup>37</sup> Downer characterized the Saw Mill River Parkway as the most important in terms of public health and welfare and potential economic benefits. All three of projects proved important in substantially expanding the geographic range of greater New York's parkway system.

Over the next ten years, the Westchester County Park Commission developed more than 17,000 acres of parkland and 160 miles of parkways. The county developed the greater part of the system; by 1924, however, the WCPC had been incorporated into the New York state park

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<sup>34</sup> Downer and Owens, *Public Parks*, 24.

<sup>35</sup> Downer and Owens, *Public Parks*, 22.

<sup>36</sup> Downer and Owens, *Public Parks*, 24.

<sup>37</sup> Downer and Owens, *Public Parks*, 26-32.

system as one of several regional commissions. Through this partnership, the WCPC was authorized to operate as an agent of New York State and was granted state funds for the purpose of extending the Bronx River Parkway 30 miles north to Peekskill in order to establish a connection with the new Bear Mountain Bridge. This extension would literally pave the way for the subsequent development of Taconic State Parkway.

## THE REGIONAL PLAN FOR NEW YORK

During the early 1920s, as the Westchester County Park Commission extended its recreational, transportation and land-use plan over one of New York City's fastest growing suburbs and the State Council of Parks began to implement an even more ambitious statewide parks and parkways plan, the Regional Plan of New York and Its Environs was also being developed to address similar concerns on an intermediate scale. Sponsored by the Russell Sage Foundation, the Regional Plan Committee (RPC) assembled experts in the fields of architecture, engineering, planning, economics, transportation and related disciplines. Beginning in 1923, this group undertook a massive, multi-volume survey and planning study of the New York metropolitan region, taking in an area within a 50-mile radius of Manhattan and including parts of New York, New Jersey and Connecticut. Within this area, the RPC addressed contemporary and anticipated planning and zoning issues for the next forty years, during which time the population was expected to double. Over a six-year period, the Regional Plan Committee published a series of detailed topical studies. A summary of the results of the study and the committee's recommendations for hundreds of specific projects were published in two volumes, *The Graphic Regional Plan* (1929) and *The Building of the City* (1931).

Within the metropolitan region, the RPC's objectives were similar to those that informed the State Council of Parks' 1925 recommendations for land-use planning across the state. Not surprisingly, Jay Downer and Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., both members of the state park plan committee, served on Regional Plan advisory committees, and the Westchester County Park Commission, Palisades Interstate Park Commission, Long Island State Park Commission and American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society were all listed as collaborating agencies or institutions. Like the State Council of Parks, the RPC recommended careful planning for an appropriate balance of land uses and user needs and asserted the intimate connections between land used for movement and all other land uses.<sup>38</sup>

Influenced by the phenomenal success of the Bronx River Parkway and the Westchester County system, the RPC heralded parkways, when used in conjunction with careful zoning and a comprehensive system of express highways and boulevards, as the ideal solution to regional transportation needs. The RPC mentioned the Bronx River and Westchester County parkways in a variety of contexts and extensively promoted them as models for future developments, asserting, "what has been done in Westchester County in developing a park and parkway system

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<sup>38</sup> Thomas Adams, *The Building of the City*, Regional Plan of New York and Its Environs, vol. 2 (New York: The Regional Plan of New York and Its Environs, 1931), 143.

proves in the most convincing way the advantage of supplementing an improved highway system with a system of parkways and parks."<sup>39</sup>

The Regional Plan Committee endorsed dozens of new highway, boulevard, and parkway proposals across the three-state region. The committee made few suggestions for the east side of the Hudson River, however, other than to expand existing systems even farther. Later, in subsequent reports, the RPC lauded the extension of the Taconic State Parkway north into Putnam and Dutchess counties. The Regional Plan of New York was a mammoth and complex document; the scope of its transportation proposals demonstrates how the experimental ideas embodied in the Bronx River Parkway had already begun to inspire increasingly larger and more ambitious planning schemes.

## NEW YORK STATE PARKS AND PARKWAYS SYSTEM

Like the Regional Plan Committee, the New York State Council of Parks emphasized the importance of providing improved transportation between populations and parks. Identifying, acquiring and developing scenic areas would mean little unless those that they were intended to benefit could visit them often and easily. The challenge for planners was to connect citizens with the appropriate recreational opportunities, anticipate how conditions and needs might change in the future, and create a structure that could accommodate those variables. This was an especially important consideration as demographic shifts pushed parks and their service areas farther apart and leisure time increased. The average mid-twentieth century patron was likely to live at some distance from a state park and seek outdoor recreation on a temporary but regular basis. The desire to connect urban populations with a range of recreational opportunities made transportation development an essential component of the State Council of Parks' mission and produced plans for a broad and varied network of recreational roadways encompassing not just parkways, but boulevards, scenic roads and highways as well. The importance accorded to transportation planning is illustrated by the fact that virtually every written description of the park program in its first forty years—including references in the *State Bulletin*, both state park plans, the bond act, the authorizing legislation, the SCP's 1925 report, official parks travel guides, and every annual report of the Conservation Department from 1927 until the early 1960s—restated in some form the need to create a comprehensive system of state parks *and* to bring about better connections between them. For the most part, parkways continued to be cast as the ideal means of effecting these connections. Regional state park commissions continued to build parkways well into the 1960s, long after they began to lose their power to design, construct and regulate public roads.

The state park plan was intended to provide residents of every part of the state with varied recreational opportunities that would also help to preserve and showcase regional scenery. The type of recreational feature involved, the means of connecting patrons to parks, and the state's role in the process varied. Meeting the needs of inner city children, who might spend two weeks

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<sup>39</sup> *The Graphic Regional Plan*, vol. 1 (New York: Regional Plan of New York and Its Environs, 1929), 272.

at camp, and central New York farmers, who had a few hours of free time each week, required that planners provide a wide variety of recreational opportunities and transportation options. While the Palisades Interstate Park Commission continued to expand its fleet of ferries and buses, upstate commissions looked for ways to work with local officials to develop parkways and scenic highways.

Political, economic, and geographic conditions also influenced the statewide park plan. Considerations such as the high cost of land atop the Palisades escarpment, the engineering difficulties of constructing parkways through the Catskills, the advantages of expanding an already successful program in Westchester, and the availability of relatively inexpensive land in the eastern Hudson Valley influenced plans and priorities for parkway development. As situations changed over the years, development proposals shifted accordingly. There was no proposal for a parkway in the Taconic region north of Peekskill in either the 1922 or 1924 state park plan. After the new Taconic State Park Commission dedicated itself to building such a road in 1925 and demonstrated its resolve to do so over the next few years, the Taconic State Parkway assumed an important place in the state park system.

While various means of transportation were considered, the council clearly recognized the automobile's growing dominance of recreation travel. Its first guidebook, published in 1928, was called *New York State Parks and Highways*. On the cover, a serpentine road beckoned drivers toward distant mountain ranges. The introduction promised to provide information about what kind of recreational features New York State had to offer and "how these may be reached."<sup>40</sup> Since parkway development was still in its earliest stages in 1928, the guide consisted largely of maps and directions for accessing parks on existing state highways. In fact, the guide assured patrons that "New York State's highway system traverses every section, along surf-washed beaches, through cities and villages, shaded valleys, regions of mountains, lakes and streams, sections of romantic charm."<sup>41</sup> Like the 1922 and 1924 park plans, the 1925 guide featured region-by-region descriptions; since the guide was for immediate use, however, it focused on existing rather than proposed parks. Each section included a clear regional highway map and a discussion of transportation distances, types and preferred routes. As new guidebooks were published in ensuing years, information was updated to reflect new and improved parks and parkway and highway connections.

While all of the regional plans addressed transportation issues, not every region took an equally active role in planning or constructing transportation systems. Some regions never developed extensive parkway plans and not all proposed parkway plans were fully executed. Several regions, notably Long Island, Palisades, Niagara, Genesee and Taconic, stand out for their particularly detailed transportation plans, though each commission adopted different approaches, which it pursued with varying degrees of success.

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<sup>40</sup> Robert Moses, comp., *New York State Parks and Highways* (Albany: State Council of Parks, 1928), n.p.

<sup>41</sup> Moses, *State Parks and Highways*, n.p.

In the metropolitan New York-Long Island-lower Hudson Valley area, the necessity for establishing inter-regional connections was more pressing than in any other part of the state. The complications of intensive development, high population, and unimproved local transportation systems made the effort to get people to parks more challenging, while the rapid pace of development made park acquisition and parkway development a priority. Robert Moses was keenly aware of these circumstances and threw his considerable energies into developing a park and parkway system aimed at transporting New Yorkers to Long Island's beaches, parks, and suburban communities.<sup>42</sup> Moses would also play an important, though less dominating, role in the conception and early development of Taconic State Parkway.

Moses realized the value of connecting New York City with both the Palisades and the Westchester regions. Linking all three would significantly increase the range of potential recreational experiences available to New Yorkers. The key to accomplishing this goal was the construction of a Bear Mountain Bridge, which would span the Hudson River near the north end of the Hudson Highlands and link the already extensive recreational systems on the east (Westchester) and west (Palisades) sides of the river.<sup>43</sup> Extending the Bronx River Parkway 30 miles north to meet the Bear Mountain Bridge would "provide the remaining link necessary to complete a grand circuit from New York City through what is destined to be the world's greatest outer park system." A 125-mile round trip would be possible, taking drivers north from Manhattan on the east side of the river via the Bronx River Parkway and its extension, over the Bear Mountain Road and Bridge at Peekskill, south through the Palisades Interstate Park and down the west side of the river, where they could return to the city via ferry or tunnel. *A State Park Plan for New York* hailed the proposed driving tour as a splendid circuit that would be readily available to the seven million residents of the metropolitan region.<sup>44</sup> More than 5,000 cars crossed the new bridge on opening day.<sup>45</sup>

While most of the rhetoric promoting the Bronx Parkway Extension and Bear Mountain Bridge focused on enhancing recreational opportunities in the metropolitan New York area, the bridge and parkway connections also played important roles in the development of the Taconic State Parkway and the Taconic regional park system. By significantly increasing the number of visitors entering the Palisades parks, Bear Mountain Bridge demonstrated the popular appeal of park-related transportation improvements and the Bronx Parkway Extension underscored the potential benefits of a comprehensive state park system. With thousands of new patrons pouring across the bridge, moreover, it soon became obvious that even the vast preserves of Bear Mt./Harriman parks could not accommodate any more nature seekers, leading the State Council of Parks to reconsider plans to develop at least one state park in the eastern Hudson Valley. The

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<sup>42</sup> Caro, *The Powerbroker*, 157-63.

<sup>43</sup> Although the Bear Mountain Bridge, completed in 1924, played a pivotal role in the state park system, the toll bridge was constructed by the Bear Mountain Hudson River Bridge Company, a private, Harriman family enterprise, with the approval of the PIPC and the authorization of the state legislature. The legislature also required the bridge company to build the adjacent Bear Mountain Bridge Road. The 1600'-0" steel suspension bridge was the first automobile crossing south of Albany.

<sup>44</sup> New York State Association, *A State Park Plan*, 60.

<sup>45</sup> Frances F. Dunwell, *The Hudson River Highlands* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 185.

growing demand for parks east of the Hudson River provided the TSPC with additional support for its proposal to continue the Bronx Parkway Extension into Putnam County and helped justify its plan to extend the parkway considerably farther to the north.

## DEVELOPING A VISION FOR TACONIC STATE PARKWAY

### The Taconic State Park Commission

Like other state park initiatives, the development of Taconic State Parkway was directed by a regional commission established to further the general goals of the New York State park plan. While the Taconic State Park Commission (TSPC) was ostensibly created to consider a broad range of park developments in the region, it quickly focused its efforts on the TSP, though not without opposition by proponents of a competing Taconic State Park proposal. The Westchester County Park Commission provided the TSPC with inspiration and models, and the commission availed itself of the assistance and advice of numerous professionals who were leaders in park planning and parkway design, including the WCPC's Jay Downer and Gilmore Clarke. Later, the commission established a successful working relationship with the New York State Department of Public Works, whose staff made significant contributions to the parkway's design and construction.<sup>46</sup> Despite the essential contributions of these other state agencies and expert consultants, the TSPC and its professional staff took the lead in the planning, design, and development of Taconic State Parkway.<sup>47</sup>

Most of the commissioners who served between 1925, when the parkway was conceived, and 1963, when it was deemed complete, considered the parkway's development as their personal mission. William Niles and Madison Grant were themselves parkway pioneers who had been instrumental in the development of the Bronx River Parkway. Many commissioners served for long periods, and several prominent local families, such as the Masters, were represented by more than one generation. These appointees devoted an immense amount of time and effort to the commission and became personally involved in developing the regional park program. They met regularly, made frequent on-site inspections and participated in decisions concerning land acquisition, route alignment, and parkway construction.<sup>48</sup>

The commissioners maintained a close working relationship with a professional staff that was equally stable and dedicated. Several of the most influential TSPC staff devoted almost their entire careers to the commission. Paul T. Winslow, for example, who oversaw development of

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<sup>46</sup> See Christopher Tunnard and Boris Pushkarev, *Man-Man America: Chaos or Control?* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 197.

<sup>47</sup> This conclusion is supported by the TSPC's archives, minutes, and reports, which detail the pivotal role the commissioners and their staff played in every aspect of the parkway's design and development. TSPC Archives, Minutes, and Reports, Taconic State Park Commission, Mills Mansion, Staatsburg, New York, 1925-1963 (hereafter TSPC).

<sup>48</sup> In just one of many examples, an early 1930s newspaper article noted that "William White Niles...and other members of the [commission] conducted a field tour inspection of the proposed parkway route through Northern Dutchess and through all of Columbia County Saturday. It was decided, as nearly as possible, where the final route will pass in those sections." Article in unidentified newspaper, ca. 1930s, TSPC Clipping File, TSPC.

the regional park program, and Theodore Bowman, landscape architect, served for nearly the entire period in which the parkway was constructed. Winslow, a forester who grew up in Columbia County, began his career with the TSPC in 1927. Becoming executive secretary in 1929, Winslow led the commission until the parkway was completed in 1963. Winslow can be credited with guiding the parkway project through most of its administrative, acquisition and public relation difficulties. Commission minutes and newspaper articles reveal him to have been involved in every aspect of the commission's activities, including developing a regional park program, personally handling land acquisition activities, serving as liaison to the State Council of Parks and becoming a respected local spokesperson for the parkway program. At his death in 1963, the State Council of Parks observed, "some of the most significant accomplishments of the New York State Park system bear the marks of his long service, sound judgment and good counsel."<sup>49</sup>

The commission assumed complete authority for the parkway, making decisions about planning, development and construction, and community relations based on its knowledge of the region, its conception of the project's purposes, and its ideas about the development and administration of the regional park program. The commissioners never hesitated to pit their opinions against the advice of outside experts. Rejecting recommendations to involve a more experienced parkway designer in the layout process, for instance, Commissioner William Niles asserted, "In my opinion this baseline should be run by Mr. Howe [TSPC chief engineer] or his successor, relying on the extensive knowledge which you, Mr. Masters, Mr. Webb and Mr. Winslow possess of the country through which the parkway is to run . . . the commission does not need and is better off without the advice of a landscape architect at this time."<sup>50</sup> Seeing themselves as natives of the region and good neighbors to its population, the TSPC commissioners resisted Moses' recommendations to acquire land primarily by eminent domain, preferring wherever possible to reach friendly agreements with property owners.<sup>51</sup> The commission zealously retained and employed the power of design approval. As early as 1932, Commissioner Niles forcefully rejected a suggestion that the project be turned over to the Public Works Department. Niles believed this to be a terrible mistake, stating that the commissioners would have "almost come to the end of their beautiful park work if the improvement of the parkways was to be turned over to the Highway authorities."<sup>52</sup>

That the Taconic State Park Commission was able to maintain such an influential role in parkway project's design and construction can be attributed to a variety of factors. Franklin Delano Roosevelt's lasting impact on the commission and on the broader parkway project was clearly significant. As the commission's first chairman, FDR played a prominent role in developing and articulating the TSPC's mission, determining the parkway's route, and defining its general design philosophy and broader programmatic goals. Roosevelt even went so far as to

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<sup>49</sup> Arthur W. Boomhower, tribute delivered at Paul Winslow's retirement dinner, January 1963, TSPC Correspondence, TSPC; and "Paul Winslow Dies; Taconic Park Official Served for 36 Years," *Poughkeepsie Journal*, 13 August 1963.

<sup>50</sup> William White Niles to FDR, letter, 17 July 1928, FDRL.

<sup>51</sup> TSPC Minutes, 17 November 1952, TSPC.

<sup>52</sup> Minutes, State Council of Parks, 28 April 1932, New York State Archives, Albany, NY (hereafter NYSA).

demand design modifications for bridges and other structures that he believed would do a better job of evoking the region's vernacular architecture and cultural traditions. Although Roosevelt was not the sole source of the parkway's design and inspiration, his commanding presence during the commission's formative years, his detailed suggestions about the parkway's route and character, his active efforts to acquire land, and his personal interaction with state, county, and local officials and the press had a significant impact on the outcome of the project. FDR was committed to the parkway on an intensely personal level, as well. Not only did he come from an old and prominent local family, he continued to remain a part-time Hudson Valley native whose life was divided between country and city environments.<sup>53</sup> In this sense, Roosevelt was well aware of the potential recreational value a trip to the region might hold for urban residents.

FDR's personal interest in the automobile's social, recreational, and political potential is also well documented. In 1910, when automobiles were far from ubiquitous, he became the first in his district to campaign by car, winning his first elected office as a New York state senator.<sup>54</sup> Automobile tourism held special appeal for Roosevelt after he lost the use of his legs to polio in the early 1920s. Roaming the Hudson Valley by car, Roosevelt was able to preserve a personal connection to places throughout the region. He relished opportunities to share the area's charms by taking friends and visitors on recreational motor tours.<sup>55</sup> FDR later attested to his early interest in building a scenic highway in the eastern Hudson Valley, an idea that apparently predated his appointment to the commission.<sup>56</sup> Although FDR resigned from the TSPC when he became governor in 1928, he remained a strong influence on the commission for the remainder of his life.<sup>57</sup>

The relationship that FDR established with other commissioners and staff members was also undoubtedly significant, both in establishing a model of active and informed engagement and in transferring his vision of the parkway to those who undertook the responsibility for carrying it

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<sup>53</sup> Kenneth S. Davis, *FDR: The Beckoning of Destiny 1882-1928* (New York: Random House, 1971), 636, 759.

<sup>54</sup> Davis, *The Beckoning of Destiny*, 239-240.

<sup>55</sup> John G. Waite Associates, *Franklin D. Roosevelt's Top Cottage: Historic Structure Report* (Albany: Waite, 1997), n.p.; and Olin Dows, *Franklin D. Roosevelt at Hyde Park* (n.p., n.d.), 176.

<sup>56</sup> FDR to Alfred E. Smith, 14 December 1927, telegram, TSPC Correspondence, TSPC.

<sup>57</sup> The TSPC minutes indicate some of FDR's subsequent dealings with the commission. In one incident, the governor objected to the stonework planned for the bridge over Peekskill Hollow, making a number of pointed criticisms, comments and recommendations. TSPC Minutes, 6 July 1931 and 31 October 1931, TSPC; "Report of the Chief Engineer," 11 January 1932, TSPC Minutes, 1932, TSPC. As late as 1939, FDR wrote to the commission proposing a completely new spur of the parkway extending west from Washington Hollow to Hyde Park, where motorists could visit the new FDR Library and Museum, scheduled for completion in 1941. The president offered specific suggestions about the character and design of this road and even enclosed a map indicating his preferred route. Although the commission and the SCP devoted some effort to obtaining federal funding and completing the spur after Roosevelt's death in 1945, the project never materialized. Letter, FDR to Paul T. Winslow, 19 December 1939, TSPC Correspondence, TSPC and a series of letters between the TSPC, the SCP and the U.S. Department of the Interior, April-June, 1945, all TSPC Correspondence, TSPC. The TSPC minutes indicate some of FDR's subsequent dealings with the commission. In one incident, the governor objected to the stonework planned for the bridge over Peekskill Hollow, making a number of pointed criticisms, comments and recommendations. TSPC Minutes, 6 July 1931, TSPC; and "Report of the Chief Engineer," January 1931, TSPC Minutes, 1932, TSPC.

out. Most commission members came from similar backgrounds and undoubtedly shared FDR's goals. Members of prominent families, a number of these commissioners represented long personal or familial traditions of public service and involvement with conservation efforts and regional affairs. The commissioners shared FDR's desire to preserve romanticized visions of local landscapes and cultural values and make these resources available through parkway development. The continuity of commission leadership was an important factor in the project's success, as many commissioners and staff members devoted themselves to the project over extensive terms of service.

### Establishing Priorities

Before any significant progress could be made on the TSP, however, the commission had to convince authorities at the state level that the parkway project should be funded and developed as the regional park system's top priority. Prior to FDR's involvement, the proposed Taconic State Park was the primary focus of state park planning in the region. The 1922 state park plan had called for a Tri-State Park that would include portions of New York, Massachusetts and Connecticut.<sup>58</sup> By the time the TSPC was created in 1925, more than 2,500 acres had been acquired for the Taconic State Park, New York's portion of the Tri-State Park and planning for its development was well underway.<sup>59</sup> Upon the appointment of the Taconic State Park Commission early in 1925 and Roosevelt's election as chair in April, however, the focus of regional park development efforts began to shift. The Taconic State Parkway eventually succeeded the Taconic State Park as the top development priority, but this transition generated considerable friction that produced lingering effects on the region's park system.

In the commission's first few years, there were repeated conflicts between the TSPC and the State Council of Parks (SCP) over whether the TSP or the Tri-State Park project should have higher priority. The regional commissioners clearly favored the parkway project and lobbied for the SCP's approval and funding. In October 1925 FDR complained that the SCP's proposed allocation was inadequate to acquire land for the parkway, which he insisted was the "principal task" of the commission. Jay agreed that it would be "useless" to even attempt to initiate parkway development with such meager appropriations, but countered that the commission could buy a considerable amount of land for the Tri-State Park with the funds in question.<sup>60</sup> FDR continued to belittle the Tri-State Park project over the next few years, characterizing it as a minor concern compared to the high-priority parkway proposal.<sup>61</sup> FDR even appeared to view the name "Taconic" as an obstacle to his efforts to focus the commission's efforts on parkway development that would encompass the entire east Hudson region. In his 1927 address to the

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<sup>58</sup> New York State Association, *A State Park Plan*, 1922, 77-79.

<sup>59</sup> In 1923, Francis R. Masters, Sr., a future TSP commissioner, purchased a 477-acre tract in Massachusetts, including the famous 60-foot Bash Bish Falls, which was to be held in a public trust until it could be acquired by the state of Massachusetts ("F.R. Masters Buys Falls In Berkshires, New Yorker Will Hold Scenic Gem in Trust for State of Massachusetts," *New York Times*, 9 April 1923); NYSCP, *First Annual Report*, 17; SCP Minutes, 21 May 1924, NYSA; and SCP Minutes, 28 June 1924, NYSA.

<sup>60</sup> FDR to Masters, 22 October 1925, letter, TSPC Correspondence, TSPC; and SCP Minutes, 24 October 1925, NYSA.

<sup>61</sup> FDR to Smith, 3 December 1926, letter, TSPC Correspondence, TSPC; and SCP Minutes, 27 January 1927, NYSA.

SCP, FDR proposed changing the body's name to the Eastern State Park Commission, perhaps trying to redirect the council's attention to the broader parkway project. In promoting the name change, Roosevelt objected that "the word 'Taconic' covers only a small portion of the territory under [our] jurisdiction, and the word itself is neither well known nor expressive of the broad scope of our plans." Roosevelt suggested that calling the commission the Taconic State Park Commission was "like naming the tail of the dog and not the dog itself."<sup>62</sup>

While the commission retained its original "Taconic" designation, the parkway in Putnam, Dutchess and Columbia counties was officially named the Eastern State Parkway in 1930, when the legislature assured its future by approving its proposed budget. This designation remained in effect until 1941. Although the title lacked romance, it captured the scope of the project and placed the parkway within a statewide context alongside the Long Island State Park Commission's Northern and Southern state parkways.

The conflict over the TSPC's priorities grew more serious as the commission's financial situation became increasingly perilous. In December 1927, when budget cuts threatened the state's commitment to the project, FDR insisted to Governor Alfred E. Smith that without funding for both park and parkway, the entire commission should be abolished.<sup>63</sup> The other commission members concurred, proclaiming that the drastic cuts in funding appeared to demonstrate the state's lack of commitment to the parkway project.<sup>64</sup> In his next appeal to the governor, Roosevelt repeated his contention that parkway development should dominate the agenda, arguing: "unlike many of the other state Park Commissions, our principal function is the acquisition of the parkway."<sup>65</sup> When Smith replied that "the first thing for the commission to do was to round out the Taconic Park area," Roosevelt retorted that "none of the Commissioners, including myself, would have accepted office if our objective had been merely the development of the Taconic State Park and of another development in Putnam County."<sup>66</sup> Even after the State Council of Parks acknowledged the Taconic State Parkway as a legitimate part of the TSPC's program, conflict between development of park and parkway continued to surface. One prominent side effect of these disputes was that, while the TSPC repeatedly acknowledged the desirability of a connection between the TSP and the park, the Tri-State Park was never completed according to plan and its components were never linked to the parkway.

The Taconic State Parkway, however, was developed along lines that were remarkably close to those proposed at the project's inception, though the contemplated goal of extending as far north as the Canadian border was eventually abandoned. The character of the engineering and the landscape design did change somewhat over time, however, as new sections of parkway were

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<sup>62</sup> SCP Minutes, 27 January 1927, NYSA. The selection of an appropriate name was a matter of some reflection for FDR, who at one time considered naming it the "Mahican Trail." FDR to Vanderbilt Webb, 12 September 1926, letter, FDRL.

<sup>63</sup> FDR to Smith, 14 December 1927, letter, reproduced in TSPC Minutes, 16 December 1927, TSPC.

<sup>64</sup> "Resolution," TSPC Minutes, 16 December 1927, TSPC.

<sup>65</sup> FDR to Smith, 20 December 1927, letter, FDRL.

<sup>66</sup> Smith to FDR, 23 January 1928, letter, FDRL; and FDR to Smith, 30 January 1928, letter, Research files, New York State Historic Preservation Office, Waterford, New York (hereafter NYSHPO).

constructed for more modern cars, as builders incorporated new materials and engineering improvements, and as the DPW established greater authority over the parkway building process. While the State Council of Parks retained tight control over funding and the Department of Public Works became the primary technical agent of design and construction, the TSPC never relinquished its power to revise or reject plans and recommendations that were not consistent with its design ideal. Despite political and technological changes, the parkway as it was completed in 1963 substantially met the design and program goals that had been established by the original parkway commissioners.

#### Defining the TSP: General Goals, Design Character, and Scope

While the Taconic State Parkway has an overall unity of design and program, it was developed over a forty-year period by two different commissions—the Westchester County Park Commission and the Taconic State Park Commission, and what is now known as the Taconic State Parkway was not officially named and administered as a single entity until 1941.<sup>67</sup> The SCP and the TSPC considered the Putnam County line to be the parkway's southern terminus, but the Taconic State Parkway as defined today extends from the terminus of the Bronx River Parkway in northern Westchester County to the New York State Thruway junction in northern Columbia County. The additional Westchester County section includes two components: a 30-mile stretch from Kensico Dam to the eastern end of the Bear Mountain Parkway originally known as the Bronx Parkway Extension, and a 4-mile connection between the Bear Mountain Parkway and the Putnam County border. These segments were planned and built by the WCPC between 1923 and 1932.<sup>68</sup>

Robert Moses and the State Council of Parks initially proposed the extension of the Bronx Parkway to Bear Mountain Bridge and the development of Taconic State Park as the only major state recreational initiatives on the east side of the Hudson River. The Bronx Parkway Extension had been conceived as a connection between New York City and the WCPC park system and the recreational opportunities afforded by the state park system west of the Hudson River; they did not view it as the first leg of an independent parkway on the east side of the river. At the TSPC's third meeting, in June 1925, however, FDR took the lead in pressing for the extension's incorporation into a much longer parkway that would stretch north through the heart of the Taconic region.<sup>69</sup> The proposed parkway, officially designated the Eastern State Parkway but frequently called the "Taconic Parkway," "Upper Taconic Parkway," or simply "The Taconic," would extend from the Putnam County north through Putnam, Dutchess, Columbia, and Rensselaer counties. Some proponents touted the parkway's ultimate destination as the Canadian border, more than 150 miles to the north—making it the most ambitious parkway proposal in the state.<sup>70</sup>

The planning and development of this 83-mile stretch of parkway soon came to dominate the entire state park program in the eastern Hudson Valley. This region encompassed a diversity of

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<sup>67</sup> New York State Conservation Commission, *Annual Report* (n.p., 1941).

<sup>68</sup> Only the east and west ends of the Bear Mountain Parkway were completed.

<sup>69</sup> FDR to Robert Moses, 9 June 1925, FDRL; TSPC Minutes, 28 June 1925, TSPC.

<sup>70</sup> TSPC Minutes, 20 April 1925, TSPC; and FDR to Masters, 22 October 1925, letter, FDRL.

landforms and some of New York's oldest settlement areas. These natural and cultural features would exert a strong influence on the planning, construction, and reception of the Taconic State Parkway. Geographically, the region was defined by the Hudson River shoreline, the broad flat plains of the river valley to the east, and a series of gentle hills followed by mountains rising steeply toward the Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Vermont state lines. From south to north, Putnam County was the most mountainous and least developed part of the region, while Dutchess, Columbia, and Rensselaer counties had gentler topography and more widespread settlement and agricultural patterns. In broad terms, the Taconic region could be perceived as an expansive agricultural landscape framed by two distant and imposing natural prospects: the Hudson River and Catskill Mountains far to the west and the Berkshire Mountains to the east. The riverfront corridor was characterized by an extraordinary collection of large riverfront country seats, associated agricultural and ornamental landscapes, and a series of vernacular hamlets and small villages. Agricultural development in the Taconic region was concentrated in the plains east of the Hudson and in the Harlem River Valley, which formed a narrow north-south corridor along the region's eastern border. Generally speaking, the center spine of the Taconic region was defined by a narrow north-south ridge that marked a physical and cultural divide between communities oriented west to the Hudson Valley or east to New England. Historically, this mid-section was less populated and less prosperous than the areas to the east and west.

The oldest and most densely settled areas were found along the Hudson River. This long, narrow strip included the region's oldest and most important north-south transportation route, generally known as the Post Road, which paralleled the river and linked cities, towns, and villages. NY 22, a second important north-south transportation route, traversed the Harlem Valley. The earliest east-west connections through the region paralleled the region's major streams, including the Peekskill Hollow, Fishkill, Wappingers, Roeliff Jansen, Claverack and Kinderhook creeks, the majority of which flow northeast to southwest. Later roads, turnpikes and railroads continued to follow this pattern. The other important means of east-west communication was the extensive system of small roads that connected interior farms with villages, regional centers and larger transportation systems. Many of these roads, some still unpaved, survive today. Their importance in the regional transportation network is reflected in the large number of at-grade crossings that interrupt the northern TSP.

The TSP reflected the park planning principles laid out by State Council of Parks: it took advantage of underused land, connected urban and rural areas, and promoted automobile access to parks and picturesque scenery. The philosophical and design ideas upon which it was conceived and developed were considerably more expansive, however. The recreational program established in the Taconic region was substantially influenced by the region's long history and the specifics of its location. The relationship between city and country had always been an important facet of Hudson Valley regional history. Even in the eighteenth century there was a dichotomy between urban and rural, as wealthy estate owners regularly traveled back and forth, maintaining a physical and psychic distinction between environments and life-styles. Likewise, tourism in the Hudson Valley, which boasted attractions such as the river itself and the Catskill Mountains, had long been popular among those elites who had the time and resources to

take advantage of it. In creating an opportunity to extend the benefits of city/country interconnection to the middle class, the TSPC drew upon this long tradition, while also addressing contemporary factors such as mass-produced automobiles and increased leisure time.

The Taconic State Parkway was designed to present scenic attractions and recreational opportunities different in form and character from most of the other state parkways. There were no major pre-existing state parks in the region, so the proposed parkway was not intended to link discrete recreational areas as much as to serve as a self-contained recreational experience. Although the state park plan called for the development of the Taconic State Park in the northeastern corner of the region, this reservation was still in the early stages of development when parkway planning got underway in 1925, so the commission was free to approach the region's recreational needs with an essentially clean slate. The physical character of the region itself did not suggest an obvious type of recreational development. Unlike the Genesee and Niagara regions, the Taconic area lacked a single dramatic natural wonder to serve as a central focus; its most appealing visual attractions were outside its borders. Unlike Long Island, where the state was engaged in an ambitious parkway development campaign, the Taconic region did not have the lure of ocean front beaches to draw urbanites to its parks and parkways. And unlike the Palisades and Allegany regions, it was distant from large population sources and contained no dramatic natural areas suitable for development as day-use or overnight recreation areas. In fact, the TSPC made no concerted effort to draw patrons to the region for any specific recreational activity other than automobile tourism. The primary benefit afforded by the proposed parkway was the opportunity to take a delightful drive, experience beautiful scenery, and enjoy the traditional agrarian landscape. Unlike regions in which parkways were laid out primarily to connect recreational facilities, the parkway itself would be the primary attraction.

Like the Palisades and Long Island commissions, the TSPC focused almost exclusively on the needs of New York City patrons. Although the TSP was accessible to dispersed regional population centers, the commission did not locate the road or design its amenities to accommodate local residents. This focus on urban patrons sometimes alienated the parkway's neighbors. As a limited-access road, the TSP was restricted to pleasure cars, thus excluding the farm vehicles and pick-up trucks that were the mainstays of local transportation in rural Dutchess and Columbia counties. Even worse, the new pleasure drive cut through the existing network of local farm-to-market roads, disturbing age-old local communication systems, while the road itself bisected numerous small farms. These issues proved to be sources of continued friction between the commission and the local populations.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> A series of newspaper articles in 1931, chronicling a controversy in the town of East Fishkill, Dutchess County, suggests some of the conflicts between regional and local interests. After a group of local farmers complained about the TSPC's unfair treatment, Governor Roosevelt directed the commission to hold a public hearing. TSPC Minutes, 21 July 1931, TSPC. The dispute drew a lot of attention from the local press, and although TSP commissioner Wilson M. Powell informed the conservation commissioner that the meeting had been a success, owners of farms that straddled the right-of-way remained unconvinced that they would be given access to their land on the other side or that they were being duly compensated for its loss. Wilson M. Powell to Henry Morgenthau, Jr., undated letter, TSPC Correspondence, TSPC; and "Grange Board Sees Farmers," *Poughkeepsie Eagle News*, 14 September 1931. As the controversy lingered, reporters continued to cast aspersions on the TSPC's concern for local citizens, such as observing that if a farmer's only means of travel was a pick-up truck, he would be barred from

Since the Taconic State Parkway was intended to function primarily as a recreational motorway unencumbered by utilitarian traffic, reconciling its development with existing roadways and local transportation needs was a complex and often contentious process. While the TSPC declared that a key reason for the TSP's development was to relieve congestion on the region's major north-south arteries by offering a third route sited midway between the Post Road and NY 22, the parkway offered few benefits for non-recreational regional transportation.<sup>72</sup> Commission members proclaimed that the parkway would improve regional transportation, but its route snaked through sparsely populated terrain, following no existing transportation routes, avoiding villages, and providing minimal connections between settlement areas and services. In addition to choosing a route with little practical value, the commissioners aggressively discouraged the neighboring counties from building parallel roads that would disrupt the desired views of undeveloped rural scenery.<sup>73</sup> Despite these conflicts, as the TSP extended north in the 1930s it was touted for making important connections with new or improved county highways, such as NY 52 in East Fishkill, the Cross-County Highway in Freedom Plains (NY 55, which also provided a connection to the new Mid-Hudson Bridge at Poughkeepsie), and the Mid-County Highway (NY 82).

Although the Taconic State Parkway was planned with several state parks along its route, it was expected that most motorists would not view them as independent destinations but as resting places along the way. The initial vision for these recreation areas was to develop "small camping parks" at locations where the commission identified "some particular beautiful scenic attraction."<sup>74</sup> Even when the sizes and programs of the parks became more expansive, their acquisition and development was still largely determined by the advantages they offered in terms of fixing the layout of the road or their potential to enhance the experience of recreational driving. In Putnam County, for example, the TSPC sought a large landholding from the Fahnestock family almost as soon as parkway planning began. Acquiring this scenic parcel would firmly establish the parkway's route through the center of the county and allow the

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taking his family for an outing on the parkway. "Pomona-Winslow Taconic Pow-wow," *Dutchess Independent*, 7 October 1931. Yet another reporter correctly surmised that the parkway would function primarily to carry traffic from outside the county, crossing it only to get somewhere else. "Boom This Parkway," *Beacon News*, 7 October 1931.

<sup>72</sup>Roosevelt used this rationale in pitching his proposed route to Robert Moses, noting that a mid-county route "seem[ed] wiser, in order to meet the congested traffic coming out of Westchester." FDR to Moses, 9 June 1925, letter, FDRL; and FDR to Baldwin, 8 July 1925, letter, FDRL.

<sup>73</sup>In 1926, Roosevelt wrote to the Dutchess County Board of Supervisors, suggesting objecting to plans for a Mid-County Highway from Hopewell to Stanfordville that would parallel the planned route of the Taconic. When he realized that his efforts to sway the supervisors were fruitless, FDR suggested that the TSPC should try to convince the county to move its road farther away from the parkway. Should all else fail, Roosevelt proposed that the commission buy a .25-mile strip from Hopewell to Stanfordville, on which the county would be given the right to build a permanent state highway. This scheme was intended to accommodate the county's intentions without interfering with the commission's plans. (FDR to Vernon Rockefeller, chair, Dutchess County Board of Supervisors, 7 January 1926, letter, FDRL; FDR to Lester J. Bashford, Columbia County superintendent of highways, 7 January 1926, letter, FDRL; FDR to Benson R. Frost, 28 January 1926, letter, FDRL; Letter, J. Griswold Webb, state senator, to FDR, 16 July 1926, letter FDRL; and FDR to E. J. Howe, TSPC engineer, 6 August 1926, letter, FDRL.).

<sup>74</sup>FDR to Smith, 3 December 1926, letter, FDRL.

commission to begin assembling the adjacent parcels needed to bring the parkway through the area. From a political perspective, the prospect of developing a substantial park on the Fahnestock tract would significantly increase recreational activity on the east side of the river, enhancing the TSPC's prospects for securing funding for the parkway. In a similar manner, the acquisition of Lake Charlotte in Colombia County helped justify the commission's efforts to plan and develop the parkway's northern segment. There was one significant exception to the interdependence of park and parkway development in the region. The Taconic State Park, in the far northeast corner of the region, was a separate entity conceived independently of the parkway and never completed as planned or fully integrated into the parkway's circulation and recreation systems.

While the TSP was promoted largely in terms of its recreational value for scenic pleasure driving and other outdoor activities, the parkway also showcased regional vernacular landscapes, celebrating the traditional family farm as an icon of America's cherished rural and small town values. The farmsteads and agricultural scenes visible from the parkway served an increasingly important symbolic function as rapid changes in economic conditions, settlement patterns, and life styles transformed traditional landscapes and threatened idealized conceptions of America's cultural heritage.

Many of the views from the Taconic State Parkway were significantly different from those experienced on most of the earlier urban and suburban parkways. Instead of the carefully crafted and contained scenes typical of the Westchester parkways, the TSP offered sweeping views of the region, taking in an expansive cultivated landscape framed by dramatic natural features. While the designs of earlier parkways encouraged the eye to remain within the right-of-way, helping to screen out adjacent and possibly intrusive development, the TSP barely separated itself from its surroundings—slicing through farms and fields and sometimes letting evidence of adjacent land uses extend into the right-of-way. Fences, tree lines, even planted fields continued across the parkway, and there was as an unusually high number of at-grade crossings—a feature parkway designers typically worked hard to eliminate. It seems clear that the designers not only embraced the landscape outside the right-of-way, but also in many places deliberately incorporated it into the view. Traditional vernacular landscapes were considered desirable additions to the parkway. In the process of bringing the historic landscape into the designed view, however, planners created a new picture of the old order, and in this way, they played a role in the process of transforming the rural landscape into an idealized cultural symbol.

Because it cut a completely new path through the region, the TSP offered many views that were unfamiliar or previously unavailable to casual visitors, often rearranging familiar elements into new scenes and distancing them from their original context while enhancing their symbolic value. The traditional view of a nineteenth-century farmstead from an old road or turnpike was usually the image that the original builders consciously presented to the public. This perspective emphasized the farm's role within the context of local land-use, transportation patterns, community organization, economic, and social structures. The view of the same farm from the parkway—a modern, high-speed road that cut across the landscape with regard to scenic concerns rather than historic patterns—limited the motorist's perspective to a series of casual,

anonymous views of buildings and fields. The effects of distance, speed and selectivity suggested more general meanings and contexts. Traveling quickly along, the motorists experienced a succession of images in the windshield that had an abstract associative value without having to consider underlying cultural issues that might contradict the idealized image, such as deteriorated or abandoned family farms or old homesteads newly adapted as weekend estates.

The Taconic State Parkway was laid out so that views of the immediate landscape were juxtaposed with more distant prospects, creating compositions that had not generally been visible from within the historic landscape before parkway construction. Pairing domestic scenes with large-scale natural wonders such as the Catskills encouraged viewers to interpret these scenes in the same "restorative" way they were expected to engage natural scenery. Just as the natural landscape was equated with enduring spiritual values, the cultural landscape was meant to suggest an enduring social order. The view from the TSP combined the natural and the built environments into a therapeutic recreational experience that could be used to comfort and reassure those seeking solace from changing social conditions and the stresses of contemporary life.

In the context of New York State's efforts to provide recreational opportunities for its citizens, perhaps the most innovative aspect of the Taconic State Parkway was the way that it significantly expanded the concept of a public "park." By designing a scenic pleasure drive that incorporated the Hudson Valley's cultural landscape into public view, planners promoted a recreational experience that went far beyond the bounds of state parkland, redefining an enormous private landscape as a public park. The Taconic State Park Commission effectively made large segments of the Hudson Valley's scenic and cultural landscape available for the free enjoyment of an increasingly broad public.

## PLANNING THE TACONIC STATE PARKWAY

### Determining and Acquiring the Route

Determining the parkway's general route and acquiring the land to develop it proved to be prolonged and contentious endeavors, which were complicated by financial issues, practical design concerns, political factors, and the forceful personalities involved in the planning process. Everyone agreed that the Taconic State Parkway should be a continuation of the Bronx Parkway Extension, but determining its path from that point onward was no easy matter, as prominent planners and politicians sparred over the parkway's course, landowners exhibited a wide range of responses ranging from public benevolence to intractable resistance to flagrant attempts at profiteering in land sales, and planners, landscape architects, engineers, and designers quibbled over alignment decisions, development strategies, and design criteria.

FDR apparently arrived at the TSPC with specific ideas about the route of the proposed parkway. At the commission's third meeting, Roosevelt led the discussion of a route "starting at the southern boundary of Putnam County and running north through the center of Putnam, Dutchess

and Columbia Counties.” This route would proceed more or less directly north from the Bronx Parkway Extension’s terminus at Mohansic Park. More specifically, he suggested that the parkway should be laid out

approximately mid-way between the Albany Post Road and the Harlem River Valley and coming out on the west side of Shenandoah Valley, passing thence east of East Fishkill, east of Hopewell, east of Arthursburg, east of Billings, east of Moores Mill, east of Washington Hollow, east of Stanfordville, west of Bangall to the south end of Stissing Mountain, thence over the top of Stissing Mountain through Silvernails and past Charlotte Lake, thence approximately in a straight line to Philmont and on past Chatham, with the idea that at some point north of Chatham the parkway would be divided and one fork would lead northeast to Williamstown and the Mohawk Trail and the other fork northwest, passing east of Troy, to the Saratoga battle field.<sup>75</sup>

FDR was not the only powerful figure with strong opinions about the parkway’s location, however. Robert Moses maintained that the new parkway should incorporate the proposed Bear Mountain Parkway and extend from the Bear Mountain Bridge along the Hudson River to Cold Spring before heading east across Putnam County and thence northeast toward the Tri-State Park.<sup>76</sup> From a scenic point of view, paralleling the Hudson River for approximately eight miles would afford numerous opportunities to provide striking views of impressive natural scenery. Practically speaking, however, transforming the historic Route 9 corridor into a limited-access parkway posed severe obstacles. Upgrading the old road and restricting it to private recreational vehicles would wreak havoc on local transportation patterns, but there was little or no room in most places to build satisfactory parallel roadways. Reducing the number of dangerous crossroads, moreover, would require an excessive number of grade separations. From a political perspective, acquiring land for a riverfront parkway would alienate the powerful old families that maintained grand estates along the highlands that presented the most logical location for a recreational driveway intended to display the storied Hudson River scenery.

Moses outlined his proposal at the TSPC’s first meeting in April 1925.<sup>77</sup> FDR was not present at the April meeting, but he immediately set to work promoting his rival inland alignment at the commission’s next gathering.<sup>78</sup> FDR noted that the Bear Mountain Bridge would be adequately connected to the north by a new state highway and insisted that a more central parkway alignment located approximately halfway between the Hudson River and the Harlem Valley would better accommodate recreational traffic heading north out of New York City.<sup>79</sup> The committee considered an outline of FDR’s proposed route at its July meeting and recommended

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<sup>75</sup> TSPC Minutes, 28 June 1925, TSPC.

<sup>76</sup> TSPC Minutes, 20 April 1925, TSPC.

<sup>77</sup> TSPC Minutes, 20 April 1925, TSPC.

<sup>78</sup> The minutes of the commission’s June meeting noted a communication from FDR “relative to change in route in establishing parkway connections between Bronx River-Bear Mountain Parkway and the Taconic Park.” SCP Planning Committee Minutes, 23 June 1925, NYSA.

<sup>79</sup> FDR to Moses, 9 June 1925, letter, FDRL; SCP Planning Committee Minutes, 15 May 1925, NYSA.

adopting it and including it on the state park map. Later the same day, the State Parks Council concurred.<sup>80</sup> By October, the *First Annual Report of the State Council of Parks* outlined the official route as "commencing at the Bear Mt. Parkway . . . and running almost due north through Putnam, Dutchess, Columbia and Rensselaer counties midway between the Hudson River gorge and the New England boundary."<sup>81</sup> The commission minutes record no further discussion of Moses' proposal. Although it took more than forty years for the TSP to reach northern Columbia County, the completed parkway generally followed the route that Roosevelt described in 1925.

After Moses publicly conceded to FDR's wishes, he apparently lost interest in the Taconic Parkway project, devoting his energies to Long Island parkway developments and the New York City to Bear Mountain connection that had motivated him to suggest extending the Bronx River Parkway in the first place.<sup>82</sup> While Moses acquiesced to the State Park Commission's decision, he was later quoted as saying "a Taconic Parkway should not extend north to Albany but should end only a few miles north of New York City."<sup>83</sup> Moses may have convinced Alfred E. Smith to adopt his point of view. In January 1928, the governor told FDR he had "never thought of this parkway as extending all the way up to Columbia County."<sup>84</sup> By belittling the extent and importance of the TSP project, Moses may have been seeking to ensure that his own favored programs received maximum support. The TSPC's prolonged inability to finalize the route and commence construction became increasingly embarrassing, endangering the future of the entire project.

The feud between Moses and Roosevelt may have been partially responsible for the TSPC's slow progress during its first years of existence. Between 1925 and 1929 legislative appropriations to the TSPC were minimal. The fledgling commission had no money to hire engineers or even to rent office space; it was dependent upon the State Council of Parks to provide offices adjacent to its own offices in New York City. When the first appropriation for park funds was released in Albany in the spring of 1926, a mere \$30,000 was made available to the TSPC. The allocation was divided between engineering and office staff salaries and expenses related to maintenance and operation of park property. Planning priorities emphasized the state council's initial focus on developing Taconic State Park. Nevertheless, in the summer of 1926, E.J. Howe, a New York State Department of Public Works engineer based in Poughkeepsie, was engaged to begin parkway engineering and location studies. While the commission attempted to advance its parkway plans with a bare-bones budget, it suffered insult upon injury from Moses, who chided the commission's lack of progress, claiming its was "not functioning at all."<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> SCP Planning Committee Minutes, 18 July 1925, NYSA; and SCP Minutes, 23 June 1925, NYSA.

<sup>81</sup> SCP, *First Annual Report*, 17; 32.

<sup>82</sup> Moses to FDR, 12 June 1925, letter, FDRL.

<sup>83</sup> Quoted in Caro, *The Powerbroker*, 289.

<sup>84</sup> Smith to FDR, 23 January 1928, letter, FDRL. It has been speculated that Moses had a hand in formulating some of the governor's responses to Roosevelt; this quote has even been cited as a letter from Moses to FDR; see Davis, *The Beckoning of Destiny*, 815.

<sup>85</sup> Moses to FDR, 10 September 1926, letter, FDRL.

When the legislature approved the state budget for fiscal year 1927-28, a scant \$12,500 was appropriated to the TSPC, instead of the nearly \$200,000 initially approved by the State Council of Parks. Frustrated by this setback and dismayed at the diversion of \$1 million of state park bond money to Moses' Long Island State Park Commission, Roosevelt made several emotional appeals to Governor Smith. Threatening to bring the entire project to a halt if sufficient funds were not forthcoming, Roosevelt presented Smith with an ultimatum. "There is no use in trying to argue this matter with me or with the Commission," he admonished. "It is a case of fish, cut bait, or swim ashore."<sup>86</sup> Without a reasonable appropriation, FDR proclaimed, the TSPC would be "a mere paper organization" with no reason to exist.<sup>87</sup>

The governor's reply intensified the commission's frustration. Smith directed the TSPC to scale back the parkway plans and concentrate on developing Taconic State Park. If a parkway were to be developed at all, he maintained, a small park on one of the lakes in Putnam County "would be the natural terminus for the parkway."<sup>88</sup> At this point, the fate of the entire project seemed to be in question, even though the parkway and its general route had been officially endorsed by the State Council of Parks in 1925 and the proposal had already received widespread publicity. Roosevelt was furious. "I wasn't born yesterday," he proclaimed in a letter to Smith, "I now realize the mistake I made with this Taconic State Park Commission was in not playing the kind of politics that our friend Bob Moses used. . . . [he] has skinned us alive."<sup>89</sup>

In addition to outfoxing the TSPC in the quest for park development funds, Moses cast aspersions about FDR's hiring practices. The commission's first secretary, Louis Howe, had been Roosevelt's aide when he was undersecretary of the Navy, but had few apparent qualifications for the job of organizing a parkway commission. Howe had not been selected from the civil service candidate pool, moreover, and the civil service commission in Albany challenged the appointment. Moses, who had begun his career as an ardent proponent of civil service reform, contemptuously referred to Howe as Roosevelt's "secretary and valet."<sup>90</sup> FDR wrote to Civil Service Commissioner William Rice in Howe's defense, but Paul T. Winslow, a trained forester working for Moses' Long Island State Park Commission, replaced him in the spring of 1928.

Roosevelt considered a legislative end-run to counter Moses' influence with the governor. He suggested the possibility of introducing a special bill in the state legislature to fund TSP land acquisition. Putnam County Senator J. Griswold Webb countered that such a bill would be "useless" without the backing of the State Council of Parks, which Moss effectively controlled. While the project had been officially approved, it was clear that Moses held sway over the state

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<sup>86</sup> FDR to Smith, 14 December 1927, letter, reproduced in TSPC Minutes, 16 December 1926, TSPC.

<sup>87</sup> FDR to Smith, 30 December 1927, letter, FDRL.

<sup>88</sup> Smith to FDR, 23 January 1928, letter, FDRL.

<sup>89</sup> FDR to Smith, 30 January 1928, letter, Research Files, NYSHPO.

<sup>90</sup> Louis McHenry Howe was a controversial Roosevelt staff member. Governor Smith's inner circle, of which Moses was a key player, gave Howe the nickname "Lousy Louie" in reference to Howe's unkempt appearance. See Caro, *The Powerbroker*, 286-287 for Moses's views on Howe, including his perception that Howe exerted an undue and even unhealthy influence on Roosevelt's decisions.

council and therefore controlled the purse strings on all parkway projects. Alluding to Moses' influence in another appeal to the governor, Roosevelt lamented, "I can only somewhat dejectedly and despondently say that the matter is well over 50% in your hands."<sup>91</sup>

Corroborating FDR's assertion that Moses' wielded inordinate behind-the-scenes, Smith advised FDR that the legislative leaders in Albany "would never stand for a single dollar for the parkway plan in the Taconic region."<sup>92</sup>

At this point the TSPC considered abandoning its responsibilities. It threatened either to resign immediately and turn over its affairs to the State Council of Parks or remain in office until then end of June and expend the small remaining balances for the development of Taconic State Park before terminating. Having worked for more than two years with a skeletal crew and a minimal budget, the TSPC had nonetheless managed to complete surveys in Putnam County and prepare right-of-way maps for more than 160 acres. Commissioner Masters urged patience, advising Roosevelt that it was "best to let sleeping dogs lie," notwithstanding the "damn shabby treatment" at the hands of Moses' State Council of Parks.<sup>93</sup>

Though clearly demoralized by the repeated snubs in Albany, the TSPC remained intact and pushed on with plans for the new state parkway. The general route of the parkway corridor was shaped by the commissioners' knowledge of the region, and especially by their awareness of attractive views, hills and valleys, which they identified and incorporated into the parkway plan as much as possible. Between 1925, when the TSPC convened, and 1931, when construction on the first section of the road began, much of the commission's energy and attention was devoted to the arduous process of land acquisition, which exerted a strong influence on the parkway's location on both regional and local scales. Since the commission had minimal funds for land purchases, it sought to acquire as much property as possible through donations. The availability of donated lands played an important role in determining the parkway's route. Negotiations over such acquisitions were often prolonged, however, and some highly desirable tracts slipped out of the TSPC's grasp. Shenandoah Valley, Turkey Hollow and Stissing Mountain were some of the notable scenic features of the region that the TSPC intended to showcase, but each of these areas presented intractable obstacles to acquisition and development.<sup>94</sup>

The commissioners frequently employed personal social contacts to acquire land donations, though this approach was not always successful. Having inspected the Putnam County region by car, TSPC commissioners Vanderbilt Webb and Francis R. Masters proposed routing the parkway northeast along the Peekskill Hollow Ridge to Kent Cliffs. This location would provide unsurpassed views of Putnam Valley and the Hudson Highlands. The idea was dependent on acquiring a large parcel of land from Benjamin Kittredge, who initially sought to sell rather the land for the substantial sum of \$550,000. Webb asked Kittredge to reconsider, though E.J. Howe, the TSPC's engineer, cautioned that the route would present significant difficulties in

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<sup>91</sup> FDR to Smith, 30 January 1928, letter, Research Files, NYSHPO.

<sup>92</sup> Smith to FDR, 3 February, 1928, letter, FDRL.

<sup>93</sup> Masters to FDR, 7 March 1928, letter, FDRL.

<sup>94</sup> Roosevelt wrote "the exact route [of the parkway] will be determined, in part, by our ability to get the land for the least possible cost." FDR to E.J. Springarn, 27 January 1926, letter, FDRL.

construction. FDR was also skeptical, acknowledging the route's scenic potential, while expressing reservations about the exorbitant price. FDR was also concerned that including Kent Cliffs would take the parkway too far toward the east.<sup>95</sup>

While the fate of the Kittredge property remained uncertain, the commission was simultaneously investigating an alternative route through a large parcel of land in the center of Putnam County held by the Fahnestock family. Unlike Kittredge, the Fahnestocks appeared amenable to making a sizeable property donation. In 1929 Dr. Ernest Fahnestock, who owned more than 7,500 acres in the vicinity, agreed to transfer 2,241 acres to the TSPC. Fahnestock gave the land with the stipulation that it be developed into a public park that would serve as a memorial to his late brother Clarence, a surgeon who died in France in World War I. Despite the arguably more appealing views from Kittredge's property, the Fahnestock donation had a number of advantages: it would enable the TSCPC to establish a major component of the parkway route through Putnam County at minimal cost, the large tract could be developed into an attractive recreational feature, and the high-profile donation would hopefully set a precedent for future gifts. The proposed park development could also help cultivate general support for the TSP by making a beautiful and rugged section of Putnam County available for public recreation quickly and economically. The commission was under considerable pressure to develop a park in Putnam County, as overcrowding at Harriman and Bear Mountain state parks had created demand for an alternative facility in close proximity to New York City. With Fahnestock's donation, the commission created a valuable and easily accessible recreation area out of a large tract of privately held land relatively near the crowded metropolis. An important feature the property lacked, however, was a body of water sufficiently large for popular recreation activities—fishing, swimming, and boating. Development plans included damming a creek on the property to create a large lake.

Masters also had his eye on acquiring Lake Charlotte, a 255-acre spring-fed lake in the Columbia County town of Taghkanic. Its owner, Dr. McRae Livingston had expressed interest in transferring the lake, all six miles of shoreline, and an adjacent 172 acres of land for a nominal sum. Over the years, Lake Charlotte had developed into a popular local resort area. Dozens of seasonal cottages had been erected close to the shore, which commissioner Niles dismissed as "nuisance shacks." Summer residents owned the cottages, but Livingston leased the lots on which they stood. Acquisition of Lake Charlotte would establish a lovely park near the northern extremity of the Taconic region and provide irrefutable justification for continuing the parkway beyond Putnam County. In the spring 1929, Masters escorted Westchester County Park Commission Senior Landscape Architect Gilmore Clarke and Palisades Interstate Park Commission Chief Engineer William Welch on an inspection tour of the Livingston property. Clarke and Welch were "favorably impressed."<sup>96</sup> The proposed park even had the endorsement of Moses and the State Council of Parks. Commissioner Madison Grant urged the TSPC to "make a fight" to acquire the lake. In 1930 the TSPC paid Livingston \$25,000 for title to his property at Lake Charlotte and began developing the property as Lake Taghkanic State Park.

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<sup>95</sup> Masters to FDR, 23 June 1926, letter, FDRL; FDR to Masters, 28 June 1926, letter, TSPC; Webb to B.H. Kittredge, 13 July 1926, letter, FDRL; and TSPC Minutes, 17 May 1927, TSPC.

<sup>96</sup> TSPC Minutes, 12 June 1929, TSPC.

When appeals to altruism and public duty failed to solicit donations, the TSCP resorted to the argument that giving a portion of one's landholdings to the parkway would increase the value of the remaining property by rendering it more accessible and desirable. The idea that parkways would improve local property values—as they had done in Westchester County—was a powerful one, both as an organizing principle for laying out the parkway route and as a means of attracting donations. Local communities were beginning to understand the benefits the new parkway would have on real estate values, and donations of property started to accrue. Farmers whose lands would be truncated or separated by parkway land acquisition were frequently resistant to this logic, however. When the parkway's proposed route required eight acres belonging to an East Fishkill farmer named Homer Knapp, for example, the commission acknowledged that the acquisition would "leav[e] a substantial and inaccessible area east of the parkway." Because Knapp's farm would theoretically be damaged by the parkway cutting through his fields, he was granted the right to access the parkway from his farm, resulting in the at-grade intersection known today as Knapp Road. Future negotiations to acquire portions of farms or larger properties abutting the parkway rarely offered easements for parkway access; adjustments to the parkway baseline were made to try to minimize or eliminate these conflicts.<sup>97</sup>

Farmers whose property would be split by the new road could still appeal to the New York State Court of Claims. One farmer in southern Dutchess County whose farm had been severed by the parkway won a judgment for damages from the court but was denied the easement he requested. In a challenge to the commission's authority to restrict the road to passenger vehicles, the farmer began using the parkway to access his fields and was arrested for driving his truck on the parkway. A jury trial was granted, which would test the commission's policy of prohibiting access to commercial vehicles. The commission prepared for the trial by consulting with the attorney general and the State Council of Parks, seeking to set a legal precedent in this case that would clearly establish the commission's authority with regard to parkway access. The court ruled in favor of the TSPC, advising that: "the commission's rules, regulations and ordinances should be enforced." While farmers on tractors were prohibited from driving on the parkway, their cattle were granted the right-of-way: "the operator of any vehicle shall stop and not proceed until such cattle . . . are safely across [the] parkway or road."<sup>98</sup>

The parkway proposal soon began to exert an inflationary effect on local property values. To counter such speculation, the commission offered what it termed "standard values consistent with neighborhood sales." The commission attempted to codify a plan for managing its small allotment of land acquisition funds, formally resolving to spend no more than \$15 dollars an acre for property required in Putnam County and no more than \$10 dollars an acre in Dutchess, Columbia and Rensselaer counties. Property appropriation through the exercise of eminent domain was viewed as a last resort. Only when negotiations finally broke down would the

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<sup>97</sup> TSPC Minutes, 13 November 1933 and 19 February 1934, TSPC. A farmer in the Dutchess County town of Milan, whom the commission characterized as "a hard worker and an agricultural college man," responded to an offer of \$25 per acre with a demand for \$100 per acre. As the proposed taking on his property would include pasture and farmland of "fair quality," the commission voted to inspect the property and adjusted the taking line to spare his farm. TSPC Minutes, 25 July 1931, 3 August 1931, and 6 January 1932, TSPC.

<sup>98</sup> Chapter 689, Laws of 1941, Ordinance 8.

commission issue a "ten-day letter." This legal instrument notified property owners that if they refused to accept the state's price, their property would be appropriated within ten days.

Rising real estate values in Putnam County further complicated location and land acquisition issues. By the late 1920s, Putnam County was becoming an increasingly developed suburban district. The mountainous rocky terrain had been of little value since the area's nineteenth-century iron mines closed, but it was apparent to WCPC engineer Jay Downer, that "a land boom was imminent."<sup>99</sup> In spite of budgetary restraints, by the end of 1928 the commission had acquired rights-of-way in Putnam, Dutchess, and Columbia counties totaling 14.03 miles, or 645 acres. Property not acquired by donation was purchased at an average price of \$18.69 an acre.<sup>100</sup> By July 1931 southern Dutchess County property owners were expressing discontent at the prices being offered for their land. Some owners were clearly attempting to turn a handsome profit by selling to the TSPC. Poughkeepsie City Attorney Charles Garrison purchased a 117-acre farm in East Fishkill for \$4,500 in 1929. Two years later, his asking price was \$10,00, even though the commission noted that the farm "appeared to be deserted in every respect." Some demands were patently outrageous. One East Fishkill farmer responded to an offer of \$80 per acre for his 81-acre property with a demand for \$1,000. Despite the official resolution to spend no more than \$10 an acre in Putnam County, the TSPC's records reflect that by the mid 1930s an average of \$75-\$100 per acre was paid for most parcels.<sup>101</sup> After more than six years of parkway planning and no actual road construction, moreover, property owners along the proposed route were tempted to test the commission's resolve. Some reneged on promised gifts and sought the going market rate, which was increasing rapidly. Others made demands to adjust the parkway location to their advantage, even after surveys and plans had been completed.<sup>102</sup>

The TSPC attempted to soothe hard feelings and solicit support by holding public meetings to tout the virtues of the parkway project. Roosevelt cultivated the Dutchess County Board of Supervisors and the Columbia County supervisor of highways. WCPC landscape architect Gilmore Clarke gave a lecture and showed slides of Westchester's parkways to area farmers at a Grange hall in Dutchess County. His efforts won over the assembled audience. Grange support was important for the commission, as the small farmers active in the association owned much of the right-of-way property the commission required in Dutchess County. The parkway was promoted as a means of attracting economic development to the lightly populated towns along the parkway's corridor. The TSPC also pointed out that a system of state parks would serve the public good by opening up recreational and scenic areas to the public, though this argument may have been less compelling to local rural communities than it was to urban and suburban residents.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Downer had toured the proposed Putnam County route with Howe and urged "every effort must be made to acquire land at this time." TSPC Minutes, 11 April 1928, TSPC.

<sup>100</sup> TSPC Minutes, 11 January 1929, TSPC.

<sup>101</sup> TSPC Minutes, 25 July 1931, TSPC.

<sup>102</sup> "Report of the Executive Secretary," November 1931, TSPC Minutes, 1931, TSPC.

<sup>103</sup> Letter, FDR to Vernon Rockefeller, Dutchess County Board of Supervisors, 7 January 1928, FDRL; letter, FDR to Lester J. Bashford, Columbia County Supervisor of highways, 7 June 1926, FDRL; Clarke's efforts to gain favor with the Grange were mentioned in TSPC Minutes, 7 June 1928, TSPC.

The campaign to cultivate local support emphasized that, as a state project, no municipal or county funds would be required for parkway construction and that the state funds would not come at the expense of normal appropriations for road maintenance and construction. Counties received allocations for road building directly from the state budget and county boards jealously guarded these funds to finance their own projects.<sup>104</sup> Roosevelt insisted that the proposed parkway would not compete with local road-building programs.<sup>105</sup> FDR knew that requesting county governments to abandon plans for building their own roads would surely result in "insurrection."<sup>106</sup> The Putnam County board of supervisors had already informed the state superintendent of public works that they would not support the parkway on the grounds that they "had all the state and county highways they wish."<sup>107</sup> The TSPC also had its own reasons for seeking to ensure that the parkway and local road projects did not overlap. FDR and his fellow commissioners were worried that local road improvements would be visible from the parkway, spoiling the desired illusion of untrammelled nature and traditional vernacular landscapes.<sup>108</sup>

The Putnam County Board of Supervisors' refusal to cooperate with the TSPC also reflected the fact that parkways were not designed to facilitate local traffic. As through routes restricted to private passenger vehicles, parkways had limited appeal to local governments seeking to expand transportation facilities for all kinds of traffic, including commercial vehicles, trucks, and farm equipment. Though the Putnam County Board of Supervisors initially resisted cooperation with the TSPC, by 1927 the new parkway's anticipated impact on future development of the region could no longer be ignored. At the urging of the chamber of commerce, the Putnam County Planning and Development Commission was chartered in 1927, with the primary purpose of developing a modern transportation infrastructure.<sup>109</sup> Though the TSP would have limited utility as a component in the county road system, the parkway at least offered an alternative for passenger traffic on the county's outdated and overcrowded roads.

Such political and economic issues forced the commission to modify some of its larger goals. The TSPC ultimately failed in its effort to acquire Turkey Hollow as a state park. Much of Turkey Hollow, which was located near Wassaic in eastern Dutchess County, was owned by Millbrook resident Oakleigh Thorne, who had consolidated numerous small farms into a burgeoning corporate farming operation. Thorne offered a 783-acre tract to the commission, but his sale price of \$50,000 was beyond its reach. A committee of the State Council of Parks, including Welch, Downer and Moses, inspected the property and deemed it unsuitable for park purposes in any event, based on its proximity to Taconic State Park and what the committee described as limited scenic and recreational values.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> See "Highways of the State," *New York State Bulletin* 6 (15 March 1921) for the official state policy guiding New York State highway and development plans in the 1920s.

<sup>105</sup> FDR to Rockefeller, 7 January 1926, letter, FDRL.

<sup>106</sup> FDR to Howe, 6 August 1926, letter, FDRL.

<sup>107</sup> Frederick Stuart Greene to FDR, 26 January 1926, letter, FDRL.

<sup>108</sup> FDR to Rockefeller, 7 January 1928, letter, FDRL; and FDR to Bashford, 7 January 1926, letter, FDRL.

<sup>109</sup> Putnam County Planning and Development Commission, *First Semi-Annual Report*, December 1927.

<sup>110</sup> "Report of the Special Committee for Inspection of proposed Turkey Hollow State Park in the Taconic Region," 25 October 1926, TSPC Minutes, 1926, TSPC.

Political and financial concerns also frustrated Roosevelt's plan to route the parkway over Stissing Mountain, the highest peak in Dutchess County. The 1925 proposal carried one branch of the TSP over the top of Stissing and Little Stissing mountains, while another leg skirted the base of the mountain along its west side.<sup>111</sup> Although there was no discussion of engineering or funding difficulties in the commission's minutes, in December 1928 a local newspaper reported that the plan was being abandoned due to lack of funds.<sup>112</sup> A few days earlier, the commission had learned that property owners along the west side of the mountain had expressed their opposition to the project.<sup>113</sup>

All in all, however, the TSPC was making steady progress. The gradual acquisition of parklands, either through donation or by direct purchase, helped to establish momentum for the parkway project. Bolstered by Roosevelt's leadership in Albany after he was elected governor in 1928 and encouraged by FDR's appointment of former TSPC member Henry Morgenthau to lead the Conservation Commission (the authority under which the State Council of Parks served), the TSPC asserted its prerogative of eminent domain for the first time in 1929, appropriating 36.5 acres in Putnam County.<sup>114</sup> When the commission received its meager appropriation for 1930, \$25,000 was allocated for salaries and \$75,000 was set aside for parkway land acquisition. The budgetary situation was also about to improve. Following Roosevelt's resignation from the commission and the death of Francis R. Masters in 1929, attorney William Powell had appointed TSPC chairman. Powell pursued a \$400,000 appropriation in the 1930-31 budget for the TSP. Powell traveled to Albany with Jay Downer, an influential member of the State Council of Parks and New York's leading authority on parkway engineering, to lobby for parkway construction funds. With FDR's support and Downer's leadership, the state budget allocated the \$400,000 to the TSPC for land acquisition and parkway construction.<sup>115</sup> With significant funding in hand and considerable progress made on land acquisition, the TSPC began fine-tuning the parkway's alignment and developing construction plans.

#### Refining the Route and Developing the Design Process

Throughout the TSPC's struggles to secure adequate funding, engineer Howe had been forced to divide his time between parkway location studies and projects at Taconic State Park. Howe supervised field surveys in Putnam County from 1926 to 1928, but funding limitations had prevented these studies from being translated into actual plans and road profiles. Lacking a staff of engineers, Howe was unable to even determine a specific parkway centerline. Instead, he was called from one location to another to survey donated parcels and map out a patchwork of disconnected properties along a generalized route through Putnam County. While Howe worked in the field preparing location studies, he apparently initiated negotiations with Putnam County property owners. This over-stepping of authority did not sit well with his superiors. When

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<sup>111</sup> "Preliminary Reconnaissance of a State Parkway From Mohansic Lake in Westchester County to the Town of Chatham in Columbia County," 15 July 1925, FDRL.

<sup>112</sup> *Pine Plains Register* (New York), 18 December 1928.

<sup>113</sup> TSPC Minutes, 13 December 1928, TSPC.

<sup>114</sup> Chapter 593-3 of the Laws of 1929, Acquisition of Land, was the enabling legislation that endowed the commission with the authority to acquire property for park and parkway purposes by eminent domain.

<sup>115</sup> TSPC Minutes, 26 February 1930, TSPC.

Moses learned of Howe's land acquisition activity, he asserted "if he attempts to purchase land and get rights-of-way he will not accomplish anything."<sup>116</sup>

Howe had been working in the field for two years with surveying crews, attempting to determine the parkway route through disconnected parcels of land. He was unable to direct a cohesive field survey due to unpredictable property donations, and three years into the commission's planning activities the parkway location remained in flux. When the matter of locating a tentative line for the parkway through Dutchess and Columbia counties was discussed early in 1928, Howe was reminded that the route would have to be determined not by engineering concerns or landscape design imperatives, but by "the location of property that can be acquired by dedication." The commissioners instructed Howe to run a base line and wait "until such time as the property owners along the proposed line have signified their willingness to convey a right-of-way" before preparing specific plans.<sup>117</sup> Howe insisted that he "felt very strongly" that the commission was making a mistake in laying out the route of the parkway in this manner. Nonetheless, the commission advised Howe to proceed with running a baseline, instructing him to "do the best you can with the force you have."<sup>118</sup>

Howe opposed the policy, asserting that from an engineering standpoint, "it will be expensive and not [produce] a good line." Howe was a highway engineer who had been hired from the DPW with no parkway experience. Making note of this fact, Moses admonished, "most highway engineers have a wrong slant on the laying out of parkway routes. They cannot comprehend the difference between laying out a highway and a parkway." Moses advised Howe that "elaborate engineering and designing must be forgotten" in the initial stages of parkway planning.<sup>119</sup> Moses was well versed in the political and financial machinations required to develop large-scale public projects and believed that economic realities and broad planning concerns should govern the routing and land acquisition process. He had little sympathy for the engineer's complaints. The State Council of Parks redlined the engineer's position in July 1928 and Henry Lutz, the council's secretary, advised the TSPC that Howe was out of a job.

Shortly after Howe's termination, Gilmore Clarke sent a long letter to TSPC Chairman Roosevelt assessing Howe's accomplishments and making several suggestions about future planning procedures. Observing that he wrote "not as a novice but as one with wide experience" in parkway planning and design, Clarke insisted he was "not criticizing Mr. Howe," who he maintained had "accomplished so far a creditable piece of work." Clarke suggested that the TSPC could profit from employing aerial photographs to help lay out the parkway and locate appropriate boundaries. Aerial surveys, while unable to provide the kind of specific location information that field surveys could accomplish, could help parkway designers visualize broader concerns. Locating the parkway from aerial surveys, Clarke wrote, would disclose "many opportunities for unexpected and emphatic changes in landscape views."<sup>120</sup> Aerial photography

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<sup>116</sup> Moses to FDR, 26 September 1926, letter, FDRL.

<sup>117</sup> TSPC Minutes, 11 January 1928, TSPC.

<sup>118</sup> TSPC Minutes, 26 April 1928, TSPC.

<sup>119</sup> TSPC Minutes, 26 April 1928, TSPC.

<sup>120</sup> Gilmore Clarke to FDR, 8 August 1928, letter, TSPC Correspondence, TSPC.

revealed relationships between landscape features, houses, farm buildings, bodies of water and networks of roads and was capable of providing a broader perspective of the parkway's territory than could be obtained by field inspection or conventional maps. Clarke advised Roosevelt he had located "practically all" of the Westchester parkways in this manner.

While Clarke's underscored the need for the landscape architect's unique expertise in determining parkway routes, he expressed sympathy for Howe's perspective as an engineer working under difficult constraints. Howe's frustration stemmed from his mandate to survey individual parcels while the parkway corridor remained generalized and vague. When new donations were acquired, adjustments to the ever-changing parkway baseline were necessary. Clarke addressed this issue from both aesthetic and economic perspectives. While his strategy of locating parkways with aerial surveys identified "unexpected and emphatic" scenic landscape opportunities, it was also a valuable tactic in land acquisition policy. Clarke wrote that aerial surveys allowed planning to proceed "while property owners were seldom aware that a park or parkway was contemplated." The prime advantage of this tactic, he noted, was "that the Real Estate Department found it easier to negotiate than in instances where engineers had been on the ground before them."<sup>121</sup>

The TSPC maintained a general vision of the parkway's route through the most scenic areas of its region and focused on the broader aspects of parkway routing rather than on the specific qualities of the roadway corridor as viewed from an engineering perspective. Despite Howe's protestations, the TSPC remained steadfast in its attitude that commissioners themselves should play leading roles in determining the location of the parkway corridor. Specific alignment decisions could be made later. Clarke objected both to the commissioners' interference and to the engineer's penchant for determining alignments based on narrow technical considerations. He insisted that a landscape architect "must have a part in locating the right-of-way, else the canvas on which he is to paint may be too short or too narrow or possibly located so that the artist loses the opportunity of a notable composition." Technical and financial concerns were clearly important, but Clarke maintained that "aesthetic considerations [should] outweigh all others."<sup>122</sup>

Clarke's opinions were undoubtedly given due consideration. The TSPC did not have the reputation or the resources that the WCPC enjoyed, however. The Westchester commission had established a national reputation based on the extent and the success of its countywide system. When the WCPC was established as a separate region within the larger state park system, that commission's acknowledged expertise afforded an unusual degree of autonomy and generated ample state funding. As a new and entity, however, the TSPC had to contend with limited funding, less than enthusiastic support of its parkway project from the SCP, and pressure to produce demonstrable achievements as soon as possible. These factors prevented the TSPC from adhering to Clarke's suggested policy. The commission continued to acquire land through

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<sup>121</sup> Clarke to FDR, 8 August 1928, letter, TSPC Correspondence, TSPC.

<sup>122</sup> Clarke to FDR, 8 August 1928, letter, TSPC Correspondence, TSPC.

donations before determining a parkway baseline and would not employ a trained landscape architect until July 1929.

TSPC commissioner William White Niles also wrote Roosevelt regarding Howe's termination. While Niles agreed with Clarke that running a baseline "from start to finish" was "as fundamental and as necessary as laying out a foundation of a building before one starts to build," he continued to insist that the commissioners should determine the location of the parkway corridor. Niles had considerable parkway planning experience himself as a member of the pioneering Bronx Parkway Commission and made clear that he was well aware of the special scenic and aesthetic requirements of such a road. He opposed consulting a landscape architect at this stage of the TSP's development, maintaining that "expert advice will only tend to confuse the issue and result in delay and perhaps disagreement." Niles insisted that the commissioners were perfectly capable of determining the route based upon their "extensive knowledge of the country through which the parkway is to run."<sup>123</sup>

Niles's comments underscored an important distinction between the Westchester parkways and the Taconic program. While the Bronx River Parkway's landscaped right-of-way had to be carefully located and designed to screen the road from its heavily developed and often unsightly suburban context, the sparsely settled Taconic region offered a multitude of scenic opportunities. The TSP's viewshed could encompass mile upon mile of undeveloped countryside, borrowing distant views for parkway scenery. Niles believed that the commissioners were perfectly capable of divining an attractive route through this inherently attractive terrain. While the commissioners possessed an intimate knowledge of the region, they were not trained landscape architects. They could identify a generalized and scenic parkway route, seek property donations among their wealthy and influential friends, and drum up publicity for the parkway campaign, but they lacked the technical expertise and artistic training of landscape architects. Eventually, the TSPC would have to field a professional staff to translate its broad vision for the TSP into a concrete reality.

After several years of frustratingly low appropriations, the 1929-30 budget finally permitted the TSPC to hire a construction engineer, a right-of-way engineer, and a design engineer to finalize Howe's initial surveys, road plans and profiles. An accountant, office support staff, and a small crew of day laborers were also added to the payroll. Long Island State Park Commission Attorney Raymond McNulty was hired on a part-time basis to assist with land acquisitions. The next year's allocation provided funding for a full-time landscape architect. Downer and Clarke recommended Theodore Bowman, a trained landscape architect with five years' experience with the WCPC. Bowman was hired in July 1929. The commission hired James Bradner, to replace Howe as chief engineer in the summer of 1930. Like Howe, Bradner was a traditional highway engineer with no parkway experience. It was intended that parkway planning would benefit from a collaborative effort between a highway engineer and a landscape architect, following the principles employed with great success by the WCPC. The TSPC developed a flowchart delineating the division of labor between the two men. Bradner, as chief engineer, was responsible for "selection of lands for park and parkway purposes, right-of-way and driveway

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<sup>123</sup> Niles to FDR, 17 July 1928, letter, TSPC Correspondence, TSPC.

surveys, topographic and location surveys, plans, construction contracts and specification." Bowman, as park engineer (his title was later changed to "landscape architect") would be responsible for "reconnaissance studies in connection with the location of the parkway routes, and preparation of development, grading and planting plans." Winslow's role as the primary negotiator for parkway property was reaffirmed.<sup>124</sup>

As the parkway corridor in Putnam County began to take shape, the TSPC continued to acquire property through donation and direct purchase. Ongoing locational difficulties and repeated adjustments to the centerline continued to hobble progress throughout the early 1930s. These problems were compounded by testy relations between the new engineer and other members of the parkway development team, which eventually led to Bradner's resignation. Bradner was in a difficult position, having joined the commission after considerable work had been done on baseline location and right-of-way surveys in Putnam County. Extensive adjustments had been made to Howe's original baseline by 1930, due mostly due to the ongoing land acquisition process. Bradner was clearly not the most politic of men, as his words and actions created considerable friction with TSPC staff, commissioners, and influential outside parties. Though Bowman had worked for five years as a landscape architect on the WCPC under Clarke's supervision, Bradner quickly made it clear that he considered him unqualified. He accused Bowman and Howe of running an undesirable and inaccurate baseline through Putnam County and recommended that Clarke and WCPC Deputy Chief Engineer Leslie Holleran be engaged to repair Bowman's errors and revise the survey. This was the first of several conflicts between the chief engineer and landscape architect and set a tone for a difficult working relationship between the two men.<sup>125</sup>

Holleran and Clarke determined that the 1.5 miles of parkway descending to Peekskill Hollow Road would cost an additional \$500,000, nearly ten times the cost of the first four miles of road. Bradner accepted this assessment and blamed engineering errors by Howe and Bowman rather than the challenging terrain or the commission's land acquisition policy for delays and problems in preparing road profiles and plans. Bradner asserted that existing alignment was so poorly laid out that it would be necessary to spend additional funds to locate a new baseline so that construction could begin.<sup>126</sup> Bowman defended his alignment in a letter to TSPC Chairman Niles. His survey of the Putnam County baseline, Bowman asserted, "followed methods used by the Westchester County Park Commission and the Division of Highways, Department of Public Works of the State of New York." He admitted that this method was "not the most accurate," but maintained that it was "sufficiently accurate" for land acquisition and construction purposes.<sup>127</sup>

Bradner supervised new field studies and prepared updated rights-of-way maps, but he was obviously frustrated with the slow progress and the difficulties of the job. Paving plans for the

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<sup>124</sup> "Field of Operations," Flowchart developed by TSPC, November, 1930, TSPC Correspondence, TSPC; and "Report of the Executive Secretary," August 1930, TSPC.

<sup>125</sup> "Report of the Chief Engineer," November 1930, TSPC.

<sup>126</sup> "Report of the Chief Engineer," November 1930, TSPC.

<sup>127</sup> Theodore Bowman to Niles, 12 November 1930, letter, TSPC Correspondence, TSPC.

first section of the parkway did not conform to state highway standards and Bradner was required to prepare entirely new plans.<sup>128</sup> Further difficulties arose when the line between Knapp Road and Peekskill Hollow Road was changed after the rough grading contract was underway to accommodate the special scenic and aesthetic considerations of parkway design. This section of the road descended the Hudson Highlands at a grade of 8.5 percent. The parkway was benched into the sheer rock hillside and supported by extensive fill. According to Bowman, changes were necessary to preserve picturesque rocks on the east side of the drive. Scenic values should supersede engineering concerns in this picturesque section, Bowman maintained, insisting on additional changes that eliminated portions of a retaining wall recommended by Bradner. Bowman insisted the alterations were necessary and appropriate because "the rock encountered was of sufficient quality to stand without any artificial restraint."<sup>129</sup>

Bradner's designs for the bridges over Peekskill Hollow Road and Peekskill Hollow Creek also caused problems. In December 1931, Bradner and Winslow presented Governor Roosevelt with photographs and plans of these structures. FDR objected that the stone work appeared "entirely too finished for this type of country." He insisted on wider joints more in keeping with regional building traditions.<sup>130</sup> In addition to having to revise the stonework plans to satisfy FDR, further inspection of the location of the bridges at Peekskill Hollow revealed that pilings would be required to accommodate swampy conditions that Bradner had apparently not accounted for. The cost of the additional construction increased project expenses by \$15,000. The proposed design for the bridge masonry at the NY 301 interchange was similarly revised to be less "elaborate." The resulting design was a simple, unadorned stone-clad concrete arch with a parapet wall on a 67'-0"-span. These modifications further delayed progress on the parkway.<sup>131</sup>

While Bradner was not happy about the revisions imposed on his bridge and retaining wall designs, he was perhaps most frustrated by the commission's interference with the highway engineers' standard approach to conducting engineering surveys. Like Clarke and Howe, Bradner disagreed with the TSPC's policy of preparing surveys only after land donations were secured. In August 1931, Bradner was directed to run a baseline in Columbia County, where several hundred acres of property had been acquired. He dissented, thinking it best to wait and run the baseline in Columbia County at the same time that work was being done in neighboring Dutchess County. The TSPC had followed Clarke's advice and contracted with Fairchild Aerial Photography Company to take aerial photographs of the proposed Columbia County route. Even though this information was available, Bradner was opposed to proceeding with baseline surveys in the parkway's northern section when its southern route was still in flux.

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<sup>128</sup> Arthur Brandt, commissioner of State Highways, Department of Public Works, rejected paving plans for this first section of the parkway submitted by Bradner and approved by the commission. While the commission's official record does not reveal why these plans were considered inadequate, it represented a professional rebuke to Bradner and he was instructed to prepare "entirely new plans." TSPC Minutes, 3 August 1931, TSPC.

<sup>129</sup> "Report of the Park Engineer," 17 September 1931, TSPC Minutes, 1931, TSPC.

<sup>130</sup> "Report of the Chief Engineer," 6 January 1932, TSPC Minutes, 1932, TSPC.

<sup>131</sup> "Report of the Chief Engineer," 6 January 1932, TSPC Minutes, 1932, TSPC, 2.

The engineer's frustration with his job was compounded when cost overruns on the first section of parkway in Putnam County resulted in a lawsuit and a delinquent contractor failed to maintain the contract's construction schedule. More distressing to Bradner, apparently, were inconsistent and insufficient budget appropriations. By May 1932, the commission's tenuous economic resources prompted Bradner to write letters to his engineering staff, advising that the TSPC could make "no definite promise for continued employment beyond the current fiscal year."<sup>132</sup> Conservation Commissioner Morgenthau learned of Bradner's letter-writing campaign and wrote to TSPC Chairman Niles. Bradner's statements, Morgenthau charged, were "absolutely outrageous and untrue."<sup>133</sup> He asked Niles to "correct these false impressions." The commission took no official action to reprimand Bradner, but he resigned in January 1933. After Bradner's departure, the TSPC never hired another highway engineer.<sup>134</sup> Instead, the TSPC entered into an agreement with the DPW, whose engineers prepared plans and construction specifications for the rest of the parkway. Much of this work was done under the direction of James Bixby, regional manager of the DPW Division of Highways.

Bowman assumed the responsibilities of landscape architect and general superintendent. He apparently had a more effective collaborative working relationship with DPW engineers than with his erstwhile fellow staff member. While the DPW engineers undertook the technical road-building aspects, Bowman contributed his talents as a landscape architect to ensure that the parkway was located so as to preserve natural features such as attractive rock outcrops, native trees, and shrubs. He also sought to incorporate distant views into the parkway's viewshed. In the early fall 1933, when the first section of the parkway was nearing completion, Bowman and representatives from the DPW walked over the parkway line on the next section from the Carmel-Cold Spring Road to the Dutchess County border. Bowman suggested revisions in the DPW's proposed profile in order to make the most of the view in Dutchess County from the summit of the Highlands.<sup>135</sup> This expansive vista of the Shenandoah Valley proved to be one of the most significant planned views on the parkway's southern sector. Later, Bowman suggested an adjustment to the parkway baseline in Dutchess County in order to present distant vistas of the Catskill Mountains. Just prior to letting a contract for rough grading the parkway section between Arthursburg Road and Freedom Plains in Dutchess County, Bowman and the TSPC commissioners inspected the right-of-way and suggested a subtle relocation of the parkway centerline. A slight adjustment at this point—moving it about 100' east as it crossed over the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad tracks—provided a dramatic, distant perspective of the Catskill Mountain range on the western horizon.<sup>136</sup> Bowman would continue to make

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<sup>132</sup> J.W. Bradner to P.R. Plumer, 13 May 1932, letter, TSPC Correspondence, TSPC.

<sup>133</sup> Morgenthau to Niles, 18 May 1932, letter, TSCP Correspondence, TSCP.

<sup>134</sup> "Report of General Superintendent and Landscape Architect," 31 March 1933, TSPC Minutes, January 1933, TSPC.

<sup>135</sup> "Report of the General Superintendent and Landscape Architect," 30 September 1933, TSPC Minutes, 1933, TSPC.

<sup>136</sup> Francis Masters, Jr., Ted Bowman, and Paul Winslow inspected the proposed right-of-way and centerline for this section in November, 1936. They determined that a shift in the centerline and relocating the bridge over the railroad tracks "would afford better views from east to west and improve grade separations." TSPC Minutes, 14 December 1936, TSPC.

valuable observations and recommendations to the DPW over the course of his twenty-year employment as the commission's supervising landscape architect.

While Bowman played an important role in the TSP's initial design and planning, highway engineers from the DPW's Poughkeepsie regional office were largely responsible for the parkway's postwar development. DPW Assistant Civil Engineer Charles J. Baker prepared road plans and profiles, as well as details for culverts and headwalls, catch basins and guide rail systems from the mid 1940s to the parkway's completion in 1963.<sup>137</sup>

## BUILDING THE TACONIC STATE PARKWAY

Construction of the TSPC's portion of the Taconic State Parkway started in 1931 and was not completed until 1963. Since the parkway was developed over such a long period of time, design standards evolved over time, as did demands on the roadway. Some early sections of the parkway were modified or substantially reconstructed before the final Columbia County segment was completed. The construction process involved a number of overlapping contracts, but the work was organized in nine discrete segments. For practical and public relations reasons, these sections were bounded by connections to existing roadways, so that they could be put to use as soon as they were completed.

The first section stretched nearly 12 miles from the Westchester County line at Shrub Oak through Peekskill Hollow to NY 301 at Carmel. This first phase of construction was completed near the northeastern boundary of Fahnestock Park at NY 301 in July 1935. From NY 301, the next section covered 6 miles as it descended the Hudson Highlands and terminated at NY 52 in East Fishkill, Dutchess County. This stretch of road was opened to traffic in September 1936. The next phase of construction covered nearly 8 miles between NY 52 and NY 55 in Freedom Plains and was completed in December 1938. The following 21-mile section extended through central Dutchess County north from NY 55 to NY 199 and opened to the public in October 1949. From NY 199, the parkway entered Columbia County, continued for approximately 12 miles to NY 82 in West Taghkanic, and opened in October 1954. From NY 82, construction proceeded to bring the road to NY 23, a distance of approximately 8 miles, by December 1958. The parkway was completed between NY 23 and NY 203 in 1961. The final section brought the parkway another 8 miles north to its terminus at the Berkshire Spur of the New York Thruway near East Chatham. The parkway was finally completed and opened to traffic from Kensico Plaza to the Berkshire Thruway in November 1963.

Thirty-two years of construction and more than eighty miles separated the parkway's initial construction from its final completion. Engineering standards were regularly redefined to respond to increased driving speeds and traffic volumes and parkway builders utilized increasingly sophisticated road-building technology. When construction on the WCPC section began in the 1920s, crawling steam shovels represented the pinnacle of modernity in excavating

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<sup>137</sup> "Record Plans, Region 8, TSP-45-3 through 62-2", NYSDOT.

equipment. The crawler tread, developed for tanks in World War I, allowed better traction in mud or wet soil and was quickly adapted to civilian use. Moving behind the excavating shovel, elevating graders were pulled by tractors and leveled the exposed cut. The application of gasoline and diesel power to excavating equipment in the 1920s and 1930s improved production. A significant development in grading machinery was introduced in the late 1930s, when R.G. LeTourneau produced a self-propelled scraper capable of leveling and moving excavated earth at speeds of up to 15 mph. Better power sources and increased mechanization increased productivity and reduced expenses: a national study by the American Road Builders Association reported that moving a cubic yard of earth cost \$.40 per cubic yard in 1922 and dropped to \$.21 in 1938. Concrete paving methods also evolved throughout the course of the TSP's development, significantly increasing the amount of roadway that could be laid in one day as the process became more mechanized and efficient.<sup>138</sup>

#### Parkway Construction: 1931-35

On 28 April 1931, with a wave of Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt's hand, a gas-powered steam shovel broke ground, initiating construction of the Taconic State Parkway in Putnam County. The ceremonies were held on the Gilbert Farm, two miles north of the Westchester County line, near Barger's Pond. Robert Moses, Long Island State Park Commission Chief Engineer Arthur Howland, State Council of Parks Secretary Henry Lutz, WCPC Chair Arthur Lawrence, and a crowd of onlookers assembled to witness the event. The Cold Spring Musical Society band "burst into a triumphal march" as the shovel operator began excavation. Roosevelt took the occasion to lobby for parkways "in our sister states so that we will be able to drive over these fine roads from New York to San Francisco." He also encouraged continuation of the TSP to the Canadian border, indicating that plans for the parkway's ultimate destination were still in flux.<sup>139</sup>

Bids for TSP contracts came in from all over the northeast, though a limited number of local contractors were responsible for much of the road construction. The John Arborio Construction Company of Poughkeepsie worked on several rough grading and paving contracts, as did the Ottaviano Construction Company of Croton-on-Hudson. Christopher Brothers Contractors of Peekskill built all of the Putnam County retaining walls, as well as the bridges at Peekskill Hollow and two overlook parking areas.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> American Road Builders Association and W.C. Wixom, *Pictorial History of Road Building* (Washington, DC, 1975), 92-104.

<sup>139</sup> "Governor Roosevelt Starts Work on Parkway in Putnam," *Putnam County Courier*, 1 May 1931; "Roosevelt Visions Parkway to Canada," *New York Times*, 29 April 1931.

<sup>140</sup> "John Arborio and his sons have grown up with the TSP, having previously been contractors for much of the construction south of Route 55 in Dutchess and Westchester Counties." Taconic State Park Commission and New York State Department of Public Works, *Taconic State Parkway Extension* (n.p., 1949). Arborio was the grading, drainage, structures and pavement contractor on Section 4, in Putnam County, Section 5 and 7 and Dutchess County. Christopher Brother's wall construction and bridge work at Peekskill Hollow in Putnam County was completed in December 1935. TSPC Minutes, 17 January 1939, 18 April 1939, 19 December 1935, and 17 February 1941, TSPC.

The most difficult engineering challenge faced builders on the first section of parkway construction. Putnam County contained a mixture steep hills, narrow hollows, rocky outcrops, and seasonal wetlands. Because of the difficult terrain, the parkway was fit into a very narrow corridor and benched into steep hillsides. Contractor difficulties, personnel changes and a parkway centerline still subject to adjustments based on available property contributed to the difficulty of completing the first 11 miles of roadway for more than four years.

Construction contracts were let in successive phases. The first job was to rough-grade the parkway corridor and right-of-way and build drainage systems and culverts. Then, bridges and grade separation structures were erected. The final phase involved paving the prepared roadbed, setting curbs and guiderails, and fine grading and landscaping. Contracts overlapped, however, and at times an orderly progression could not be followed. Vagaries of weather and topography could hamper progress, and fluctuating budget appropriations complicated construction schedules.

Rough grading began with clearing and grubbing operations. The landscaping crew worked alongside the contractor to preserve desirable vegetation. Planting work on the Putnam County right-of-way began before the rough grading commenced so that landscaping crews could transplant mature trees and shrubs from the line of construction to the road's edge. On the first 7 miles of construction a thirteen-man landscaping crew moved 196 trees (mostly elm, hard maple and swamp maple) whose diameters measured 6" to 1' and transplanted 456 high bush blueberry, arrowroot, nannyberry and shrub dogwood from 4' to 10' high.<sup>141</sup> Approximately 450 rhododendron and mountain laurel shrubs were planted in the slope above the retaining wall opposite the Putnam Valley overlook. Preserved mature trees were protected by dry stone masonry wells approximately 15' in diameter. Additionally, cut timber measuring more than 8" in diameter was set aside to be used for the wooden guiderail system. Transplanting or preserving existing vegetation in the line of construction was both an economic measure and a design strategy: native trees and shrubs were less expensive to transplant than to procure from nurseries and they also contributed to the natural appearance of the parkway's carefully landscaped corridor.<sup>142</sup>

Construction on the first parkway section was divided into two phases: a 3.8 mile segment between Shrub Oak and New Hill Road, and 3.4 mile stretch from New Hill Road to Peekskill Hollow Road. Bids for grading, drainage and minor structures on the first section were let 16 March 1931, with a contract completion date scheduled for 1 October 1931. The Angelo Tomasso Construction Company of New Britain, Connecticut was awarded the contract with a low bid of \$93,876.50. The contract specified quantities for stripping, and storing topsoil amounted to 55,000 cubic yards of material to be moved. Earth excavation of 65,000 cubic

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<sup>141</sup> "Report of the Park Engineer," 30 June 1931, TSPC Minutes, 1931, TSPC.

<sup>142</sup> Bowman noted the cost of transplanting shrubs cost approximately one dollar each and the expense of transplanting mature trees (over 6" in diameter) amounted to thirteen dollars and fifty cents each. Bradner reported "it is planned to remove those plants whose replacement would be impossible or uneconomical." "Report of Park Engineer, Summary of Planting Operations for Spring 1931," n.d., TSPC Minutes, 1931, TSPC; and "Report of Chief Engineer," 2 February 1931, TSPC Minutes, 1931, TSPC.

yards and rock excavation of 26,000 cubic yards as well as 100,000 cubic yards of embankment stabilization were estimated.<sup>143</sup> The large amount of embankment construction was due to the necessity of erecting a retaining wall on the eastern right-of-way, where the parkway cut through the steep hills of southern Putnam County. In addition, 4,200 linear feet of drainage pipe and 14,000 linear feet of porous tile underdrain were included in the "minor structures" portion of the construction contract.<sup>144</sup>

An overlook parking area was constructed in the first section of the parkway, located near Bullet Hole Road. This feature was a new element in the parkway's design and marked a distinction between Westchester's parkways and the TSP. The overlook was planned to provide drivers an opportunity to stop and rest on longer drives and to take in broad views of the Putnam Valley. Its surface differed from the parkway drive and was originally unpaved. An asphalt binder was spread over rolled crushed stone on the parking area. A turf island separated it from the parkway drive, and blinker lights were added to assist night drivers.<sup>145</sup>

Reflector button safety guides attached to the parkway pavement at the approaches to all islands (at exits) and parkway approaches (entrances) contributed an extra measure of safety for night driving. Regulatory and directional signs were also erected on the first section of the parkway, indicating speed limits, town boundaries and at-grade crossings. Signs were uniformly designed with yellow lettering on a green field and were hung from wrought iron brackets on seasoned peeled posts.<sup>146</sup>

Bids were let on 30 April 1931 for the second phase of construction, taking the parkway to Peekskill Hollow Road. Christopher Brothers of Peekskill submitted the low bid of \$185,072 for rough grading, constructing an overlook parking area at Hosner Mountain and erecting another section of retaining walls. Construction of this section required excavation and movement of 67,000 cubic yards of earth for the roadbed and an additional 30,000 cubic yards for the required drainage systems and stone retaining walls. Fill in swamplands and hollows were made with material borrowed from cuts through rock outcrops that had to be blasted to settle and stabilize the embankment. Maintaining a finished slope incline on a ratio of 4 to 1, the grading contract required that the embankments be spread with a layer of topsoil not more than 12" in depth and thoroughly rolled with a self-propelling roller weighing not less than 10 tons.<sup>147</sup>

As the parkway corridor descended toward Peekskill Hollow, the roadbed was fit tightly into the steep hillside, with as little as one foot of shoulder between the edge of the driving lane and the rock outcrop and retaining walls. Slopes, elevation and horizontal and vertical alignments were calculated to provide for safe and pleasurable driving at 35-mph speeds. Superelevation (or banking) was designed to allow safe and comfortable transitions between horizontal curves. Roadway superelevation was designed with a maximum gradient of 4.5 percent for all curves

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<sup>143</sup> "Report of the Chief Engineer," 4 May 1931, TSPC Minutes, 1931, TSPC.

<sup>144</sup> "Report of Chief Engineer," February 1931, TSPC Minutes, TSPC.

<sup>145</sup> TSPC Minutes, 13 November 1933, TSPC.

<sup>146</sup> TSPC Minutes, 8 January 1934, TSPC.

<sup>147</sup> "Report of the Chief Engineer," February 1931, TSPC Minutes, 1931, TSPC.

with a radius less than 1,600'.<sup>148</sup> A dry-laid stone masonry retaining wall was erected to shore up the hillside and to prevent slope movement on the uphill embankment. Drainage behind the retaining wall was accomplished by a series of 8" underdrains to reduce the danger of standing water. Weep holes at regular intervals assisted in drainage. The wall was erected in sections, interrupted in places where attractive overhanging rock outcrops could be preserved.<sup>149</sup>

Outside the curb, timber guide railing was installed using posts salvaged from clearing and grubbing operations or from Taconic State Park, where a large-scale reforestation project was underway. Two basic styles of wooden guiderails were used over the course of the parkway's construction: a system of posts surmounted by a single log rail, and posts connected with wood beams and topped with a log rail. In the Putnam County section, the guiderail was constructed with posts with log rails. Posts and top rails were peeled, seasoned hardwood between 6" and 8" in diameter. Locust, chestnut and sycamore were commonly used. Top posts were notched to join the rails at a distance of 8'-0" center-to-center. Yellow pine or Douglas fir beams measuring 3"x 8" were installed 16" below the top railing and 12" above the surface of the pavement. The timber was treated with Carbasota or similar waterproofing material. Finally, countersunk nail holes were plugged with wooden dowels and joints were sealed with elastic gum.<sup>150</sup>

Two stone-faced single arch concrete rigid frame bridges were erected at Peekskill Hollow, one over Peekskill Hollow Creek and one over Peekskill Hollow Road.<sup>151</sup> Though the estimated cost of these bridges was \$58,000, the Fox Reynolds Company was the low bidder on the contract at \$47,939. Following Roosevelt's revisions to the original design, the contract specified that dimension masonry be constructed of "granite of a color suitable to the engineer" and include ringstones and copings. The stone-faced bridge walls were designed so that a pattern of larger "Cyclopiian" stone at the bottom of the walls ranged to smaller ledge stones at the top. Horizontal ringstone soffits ran parallel to the centerline of the span. Three ¾" reinforced steel anchor pins were set at each ringstone, and quoin stones were held with two anchor pins. Stone masonry for the bridges, borrowed from roadway cuts, included fine-pointed ringstones. All other exposed surfaces featured stones projecting a maximum of 2" from ½" to ¾"-thick flush mortar joints. End pylons tapering to 2.5'-0" wide at the parapet wall completed the bridge details.<sup>152</sup>

In July 1931, three months following the inauguration of construction, TSPC Chair Niles wrote to WCPC President Arthur Lawrence to note that he was "considerably disturbed" that progress was lagging on the connecting 4-mile link between the Bronx Parkway Extension and the start of the TSP. This short segment, which could be characterized as the "second" Bronx Parkway Extension, extended from Mohansic Park to Shrub Oak at the Putnam County line. Observing

<sup>148</sup> "Report of the Chief Engineer," November 1932, TSPC Minutes, 1932, TSPC.

<sup>149</sup> "Report of the Park Engineer," 17 September 1931, TSPC Minutes, 1931, TSPC; and "Report of Chief Engineer," February 1931, TSPC Minutes, 1931, TSPC.

<sup>150</sup> "Record Plans, Region 8; ESP 37-2, Section 4, Sheet 3 of 25," 1937, NYDOT.

<sup>151</sup> A detailed bridge survey was not undertaken as part of this recording project. Refer to HAER No. NY-316 drawing sheet 12 of 13 for a representative sample of Taconic State Parkway bridge types.

<sup>152</sup> "Record Plans, Region 8, ESP 33-2, Sheet 7 of 47," NYDOT.

that the TSP's success "depended upon the construction of the Mohansic Park connection," Niles warned that Westchester's delay would render the new state parkway "useless."<sup>153</sup>

WCPC Chief Engineer Downer blamed the delays on bad weather, claiming that the "peculiar clay soil" north of Mohansic Park froze solid in winter and made it difficult to work in wet weather. After six months of frustratingly little progress, Downer reported, the contractor, Cook Brothers Construction Company of Scarsdale, insisted that it "could go no further." Westchester had hired a new contractor to work as a "pinch hitter" on rough grading this difficult section and Downer assured Niles that the connection would be ready for paving by spring 1932.

Commenting, perhaps, on the TSPC's own repeated delays, he observed, "I have no doubt that we will have our paving up to your connection before you are ready to open the first section of your parkway."<sup>154</sup> Downer lived up to his promise when the connection from Mohansic Park to Shrub Oak was completed in November 1932, nearly three years before the first section of the TSP would open to the public. If the TSPC seemed to lack the efficiency of its Westchester counterpart, it also lacked the kind of budget appropriations the WCPC received for the Bronx Parkway Extension and the short connector to the TSP. Following the initial allocation of \$1 million, Westchester's parkway extension project continued to receive regular, ample allocations from the state budget.<sup>155</sup>

Following completion of rough grading and the construction of drainage systems and structures, paving work began on the first parkway section in 1933. The Samuel Nugent Construction Company was awarded the paving contract, having submitted the lowest bid at \$224,826 for approximately 3.5 miles of roadway. Before paving could begin on the Nugent contract, DPW inspectors directed the contractor to excavate ditches for additional catch basins to assist in drainage behind the retaining wall. Bradner had reservations about excavating in front of the retaining wall on the eastern right-of-way for the additional catch basins. In his monthly report to the commission, he wrote, "I do not know that the stability of this wall depends on the capacity of the soil at the toe of the wall to sustain the load assumed in the design of the wall."<sup>156</sup> The required drainage improvements were not completed in time. Nugent began the paving job, but after laying 2,400' of pavement, the concrete roadway slabs froze in the cold weather. Once warm weather arrived, this section had to be totally reconstructed. Paving resumed between Shrub Oak and Peekskill Hollow Road in spring and was not completed by the following November. While the pavement contract was delayed, bridle paths from Shrub Oak to NY 301 had been cleared within the right-of-way and were opened to the public by summer 1933. The commission had reservations about how it could afford to maintain the bridle paths and considered charging user fees. Bridle paths were popular features included in Westchester's parkways and county taxes supported their maintenance. Lack of funding to maintain the TSP

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<sup>153</sup> Niles to Arthur Lawrence, 12 July 1931, letter, TSPC Correspondence, TSPC.

<sup>154</sup> Jay Downer to Niles, 30 July 1931, TSCP Correspondence, TSPC.

<sup>155</sup> By 1930, the WCPC had received "substantial cooperation" from the state, totaling more than \$7 million. Westchester County Park Commission, *Annual Report* (n.p., 1930).

<sup>156</sup> "Report of the Chief Engineer," November, 1932, TSPC Minutes, 1932, TSPC.

bridle paths led to their closure in the early 1940s and they never extended beyond Putnam County.<sup>157</sup>

When parkway rough grading operations and structures (drainage systems and culverts) were finished, work began on the road's sub-base. The sub-base provided stability and assisted in drainage. An 8'-0" foundation layer of run of bank coarse (1' - ¾") and fine (¾") mix gravel was laid in the prepared area. The gravel was then twice treated with a .5 gallon per square yard mixture of cold bituminous macadam and, when set, covered again with hot bituminous macadam. The final stage in preparing the subgrade called for spreading screened gravel or slag not to exceed 25 pounds per square yard onto the still-hot bituminous material. A steamroller then passed over the gravel foundation to stabilize and set the subgrade prior to preparing the concrete pavement.<sup>158</sup>

Once the roadbed was prepared, reinforcing steel mesh or bar mats were laid over the gravel sub-base. Reinforcement introduced high-tensile steel into the concrete, allowing the roadway to withstand and support moving loads and adjust to climactic and subgrade variances. The contract specified that the clear distance between parallel bars in the mesh be not less than 1". The mesh was supported by metal chains or spacers and secured against displacement with 18-gauge annealed iron wire. Once the reinforcing mesh was prepared, wooden forms were constructed to receive the poured concrete.<sup>159</sup>

Class A concrete, consisting of one part Portland cement, two parts fine aggregate and four parts coarse aggregate, was mixed with one part water to achieve the desired consistency for spreading. A batch mixer prepared the concrete on-site, combining the cement with aggregate and water in the requisite proportions. The concrete was then deposited onto the prepared foundation, and hand-screeding allowed the mixture to be spread to a uniform 8" thickness over the slab surface and into the corners of the forms. Once the concrete was dried, the forms were removed. This process produced a pavement comprise of separate concrete slabs 10'-0" and 11'-0" wide and 7'-4" long, with a 3" barrier curb. Between each slab, ¾" doweled transverse expansion joints allowed the slabs to expand and contract without damage or cracking in hot or cold weather.<sup>160</sup>

Longitudinal joints with tie bars were sealed with a bituminous material to join the slabs at the edge of each driving lane. The slabs were crowned at 1/8" per foot in the 10'-0"-wide center lanes, and 3/16" per foot on the 11'-0"-wide outside lanes. An integral barrier curb edged the driving lane. The curbs were 6" wide at the pavement level and tapered to 5" at the top; ½" steel bars spaced 3" center-to-center reinforced and strengthened the curbs. This process represented

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<sup>157</sup> Bridle paths were constructed along the parkway right of way from the Westchester County line to the Cold Spring-Carmel Road. Winslow raised the question of their expense in a special memo to the commissioners in May of 1934. "Report of General Superintendent and Landscape Architect, May-June 1933," TSPC Minutes, TSPC; and "Memorandum to Commissioners, May 1934," TSPC Minutes, TSPC.

<sup>158</sup> "Record Plans, Region 8, ESP 33-1, Sheet 4 of 30," May 1933, NYDOT.

<sup>159</sup> "Record Plans, Region 8, ESP 33-1, Sheet 4 of 30," May 1933, NYDOT.

<sup>160</sup> "Record Plans, Region 8, ESP 38-4, Section 5, Sheet 3 of 31," 1938, NYDOT.

"state of the art" concrete highway construction at this time.<sup>161</sup> It remained the standard method of constructing the reinforced concrete pavement on the Taconic State Parkway until 1957, when the final sections of the parkway were paved with bituminous concrete, or "asphalt."<sup>162</sup>

A closed drainage system was designed to minimize the danger of standing water, or "ponding," on the parkway drives. A crowned roadbed drained water to 27"x 27" square grated catch basins located in cobble gutters at the road's edge. Water flowed from the catch basins into brick or concrete drop inlets, where either 12" or 18" (depending on the hydrology of the location) ceramic pipes carried the water to drainage outlets in the right-of-way. Exposed retaining walls at the drain outlets, called headwalls, were constructed of mortared ashlar or random rubble, consistent with the design of rusticated stonework on parkway walls and bridges.<sup>163</sup>

The paving contract for the section between Peekskill Hollow and NY 301 was awarded to the J.W. Williams Engineering Corporation of Cornwall, New York, though this contractor was pulled from the job before it was completed. Seemingly unable or unwilling to post a \$5,000 bond to indemnify himself against potential damage caused by trucking materials to the on-site batch plant, Williams was fired when Arthur Brandt, DPW's commissioner of highways, withdrew authorization for further payment on the unfinished contract. Parkway officials were concerned that driving heavy trucks to the construction site threatened damage to the road surface designed to carry lighter passenger vehicles. It could also pose a threat to existing vegetation that had been identified and carefully preserved for right-of-way landscaping. The A.E. Ottaviano Company of Croton-on-Hudson, New York completed Williams's paving contract, finishing the work in the spring of 1935.<sup>164</sup>

A grade-separation structure was erected at the northern boundary of the first section, at the junction with Cold Spring-Carmel Road (NY 301). A service station was built on the west side of the intersection with NY 301 near the entrance to Fahnestock Park. The alternating heavy rock foundation and swamplands in this vicinity complicated the rough grading operations, and extra work, including blasting the root mat and running compressors in the swamp, was required to stabilize and drain the sub-grade before the roadbed could be prepared for paving.<sup>165</sup>

As the first section was approaching completion at its junction with NY 301, plans were prepared to open the parkway to the public. The parkway opened temporarily for the Fourth of July weekend in 1935. After the holiday, it closed to traffic for several weeks until all fine grading, topsoiling, and landscaping work was completed. Although no ceremony was held to mark the opening of this section to the public, commissioners hosted state and county legislators and other officials at a picnic at Fahnestock Memorial Park in late June. They could celebrate completion

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<sup>161</sup> "Current Practice in the Design of State Highway Concrete Pavements," *American Road Builders' Association Bulletin* 25 (1932).

<sup>162</sup> The first section to be paved with asphalt extended from West Taghkanic to Martindale in Columbia County. The contract was let in the spring of 1957. TSPC Minutes, 15 April 1957, TPSC.

<sup>163</sup> "Record Plans, Region 8, ESP 35-1, Part 1, Sheet 4 of 38," 1935, NYDOT.

<sup>164</sup> TSPC Minutes, 13 November 1933, TSPC; Winslow to H.E. Breed, 10 February 1934, TSPC Minutes, TSPC; and Winslow to James Bixby, 8 March 1934, TSPC Minutes, TSPC.

<sup>165</sup> "Report of General Superintendent and Landscape Architect," 13 December 1933, TSPC Minutes, 1933, TSPC.

of approximately 11 miles of roadway, extending from the Westchester County border through the scenic Hudson Highlands. The parkway trip through the east Hudson Valley to the Bear Mountain Bridge envisioned in the state park plan remained an incomplete and circuitous route, however. The Bronx Parkway Extension offered two outlets: one, at U.S. 6, was a mixed-use highway leading to the Albany Post Road and the Bear Mountain Bridge; the other was a 4-mile connection with the TSP at Shrub Oak. Motorists intent upon traveling the length of the new parkway to its junction with the Carmel-Cold Spring Road (also a mixed-use roadway) were forced to drive some 5 miles east, and then travel approximately 12 miles south on the Albany Post Road to reach the Bear Mountain Bridge at Peekskill.<sup>166</sup>

#### Parkway Construction: 1935-38

With no chief engineer on the TSPC staff, engineers in the Poughkeepsie regional office of the DPW prepared parkway plans for the road north of NY 301. Describing the commission's relationship with the DPW, Winslow reported: "no stone has been left unturned to maintain active and friendly contact with the DPW and its resident engineer James Bixby." The commission anticipated that the DPW would receive parkway construction allocations out of the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) enacted in 1933. The NIRA was a precursor to the Works Progress Administration (WPA) established by Roosevelt in response to the Great Depression. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), founded in 1933 as a program of the WPA, offered a source of labor for much of the park and parkway landscaping work accomplished throughout the nation in the mid- to late-1930s. Much of this activity occurred in state parks. CCC laborers drawn from relief roles in Poughkeepsie were employed to construct the bridle path, clear brush, build stonewalls, and set riprap along the parkway corridor in Putnam County.<sup>167</sup> Though Winslow groused about the administrative burden of coordinating with federal agencies in order to hire CCC workers, during the lean years of the Depression, the CCC provided manpower for badly needed public works projects and was an important source of jobs for the nation's unemployed.<sup>168</sup> By 1935, five CCC camps were established at Fahnestock, Lake Taghkanic, and Taconic State Parks, supported by a WPA-funded budget of more than \$300,000.<sup>169</sup> The commission hired hundreds of workers from relief roles maintained in the cities of Poughkeepsie and Hudson and continued to rely on the CCC to provide the labor for park construction and parkway landscaping jobs until the program was abolished in 1941.

While CCC funds were committed to staff park development projects and employ landscaping crews, NIRA funds were allocated to the DPW Division of Highways for actual road construction purposes, allowing for an increased parkway construction effort between 1935 and

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<sup>166</sup> The State Council claimed traffic congestion on the Albany Post Road and the Harlem Valley Highway made it "imperative" to extend the parkway to SR 55. State of New York Conservation Department 25<sup>th</sup> *Annual Report*, 1935, p. 419.

<sup>167</sup> "Report of the General Superintendent and Landscape Architect," May 1933, TSPC Minutes, 1933, TSPC.

<sup>168</sup> Winslow complained that "at times the amount of work in setting up these [CCC] camps has seemed to make the effort hardly worth while." Beyond the bureaucratic obstacles, Winslow noted that political interests interfered with hiring CCC laborers, claiming that "Mr. Whitin, the Putnam County Democratic leader . . . has attempted continuously to dictate the personnel to be employed by the commission in this county." "Report of the Executive Secretary," 30 June 1933, TSPC Minutes, 1933, TSPC.

<sup>169</sup> TSPC Minutes, 12 November 1935, TSPC.

1939. For example, the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad grade separation, located just north of NY 52, was constructed by the Turnbull Construction Corporation of Cold Spring, New York in 1937. Turnbull's \$69,984 contract was financed by a combination of funds allocated in the state budget and funds made available through the NIRA.<sup>170</sup>

The contract for rough grading and structures for the 8-mile stretch between NY 301 and CR 52 was awarded in the spring of 1935 to the Brescia-Strada Construction Company. Christopher Brothers built another section of retaining wall as the parkway descended to East Fishkill along the western flank of Hosner Mountain. The plans also called for building an overlook parking area to take advantage of views to the Shenandoah Valley in southern Dutchess County. Ottaviano Construction Company erected a grade-separation bridge at the parkway interchange with CR 52 at an approximate cost of \$100,363. A timber guide rail system built by the D.E. Johnson Company of Freeport, Long Island was constructed at a cost of \$15,472 for the 8-mile stretch between NY 301 and NY 52. The parkway corridor along this section was graded for four lanes. Bureaucratic delays interceded, however, and paving the four-lane drive was postponed for nearly three years. Upon completion of the Ottaviano paving contract, the parkway opened to traffic as a two-lane drive on 19 September 1936.<sup>171</sup>

In May 1937 Governor Herbert Lehman vetoed a parkway construction bill passed by the state legislature that would have enabled completion of the paving job between NY 301 and CR 52.<sup>172</sup> The parkway bill also included proposals to extend Westchester's Cross County Parkway to connect with the Saw Mill River Parkway, as well as a proposal advanced by Putnam County Assemblyman D. Mallory Stephens to provide \$700,000 to continue the TSP through Putnam County as a four-lane driveway. Traffic volumes in excess of 20,000 cars a day attested to the parkway's growing popularity as a through route to and from New York. The TSPC asserted that the "dangerous and congested" conditions on this two-lane section required design improvements to ensure "the continuance of a favorable reputation for all parkways."<sup>173</sup> The TSPC considered this improvement so vital that the commissioners approached Roosevelt for support. FDR had been largely responsible for securing the commission's first substantial appropriation to fund land acquisition and parkway construction in the 1929-30 state budget, but as president he could no longer be counted on to shepherd the project through bureaucratic and political circles in Albany. While Roosevelt had played an active role in TSP affairs during his governorship, his secretary responded that "the president has made it a strict policy not to interfere in matters of this kind ever since he has been in his present position."<sup>174</sup> The commission began to cultivate closer relationships with local state officials, including Assemblyman Stephens of Putnam County and Senator Charles Bontecou, whose district encompassed Putnam, Dutchess and Columbia counties.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> TSPC Minutes, 1 November 1937, TSPC.

<sup>171</sup> TSPC Minutes, 15 November 1936, TSPC.

<sup>172</sup> "Parkway Works Vetoed by Lehman," *New York Times*, 24 May 1937, 21:5.

<sup>173</sup> TSPC Minutes, 14 December 1936, TSPC.

<sup>174</sup> M.H. McIntyre to Winslow, 29 May 1937, letter, TSPC Correspondence, TSPC.

<sup>175</sup> Stephens introduced several bills which earmarked funds specifically for the TSP. TSPC Minutes, 28 February 1939 and 21 January 1941, TSPC.

While Roosevelt was unable to direct legislative strategies on behalf of the TSPC, he continued to support the parkway project. FDR drove from Hyde Park to the site of the New York World's Fair and back on the TSP in the summer of 1938, guaranteeing widespread publicity for the new road.<sup>176</sup> FDR continued to dabble in design matters, writing to TSPC Chair Francis Masters, Jr. in 1938 with suggestions about picnic area locations along the planned route through Columbia County.<sup>177</sup> FDR was concerned that picnic locations be developed in areas offering the best opportunity for expansive views of the Hudson River Valley. Masters replied, "the first consideration in acquiring right-of-way has been the scenic point of view . . . and we have kept to the high ground where we will have a view of either the Catskills or the Taconic Range through the greater part of the county."<sup>178</sup> Masters took the opportunity to remind FDR of his ability to "prime the pump" for WPA funding. Clearly, the commission continued to benefit from FDR's interest in the parkway project.

While the final section of the parkway through Putnam County languished due to the lack of funding to expand the roadway to four contiguous lanes, within three years the parkway extended another 8 miles into Dutchess County. When the next section of the parkway opened to the public on 15 December 1939, it reached NY 55, approximately 9 miles east of Poughkeepsie in central Dutchess County.<sup>179</sup>

A significant change in the parkway's design strategy occurred where the parkway neared its junction with NY 52. Up to this point, the TSP had been constructed as a four-lane undivided roadway with no median separating north- and south-bound traffic. This was standard practice at the time. Parkway designers realized that medians provided significant benefits in terms of safety, efficiency, and aesthetics, but four-lane divided parkways required wider right-of-ways and were significantly more expensive to construct. A few short sections of the WCPC and Long Island parkways had medians, but beginning with the rough grading contract awarded to Lane Construction Corporation of Meriden, Connecticut in April 1936, the TSP made the long anticipated transformation into a fully divided parkway. The 3-mile stretch from East Fishkill to Arthursburg was planned and constructed as two 11'-0"-wide reinforced concrete driving lanes separated by a landscaped median between 30' and 50' wide. For the rest of its route, the parkway drives followed independent alignments around a varying width median, with the exception of bridge crossings and at intersections, where the driveways came together to be separated by a narrow median. The same method of constructing concrete pavement with an integral curb was deployed on the divided roadway, though slabs were constructed in lengths of 91'-6" and 94'-5". Arborio's paving contract called for 92,650 square feet of 8'-0" uniform pavement. Reflecting the variation in topography and curvature of the northbound and southbound drives, the northbound drive was 5.1 miles in length, while the distance between the

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<sup>176</sup> FDR's tour was duly reported in the *New York Times*, which noted that more than 3,000 state police officers stood guard along the route of the presidential motorcade. *New York Times*, 28 June 1928, 11:1.

<sup>177</sup> In 1931, two years after his father's death, Francis R. Masters, Jr. was appointed to the TSPC. Except for an absence during World War II, the younger Masters served the commission continuously until 1949. Unless otherwise noted, all subsequent references refer to Francis R. Masters, Jr.

<sup>178</sup> Masters to FDR, 6 September 1938, letter, FDRL.

<sup>179</sup> TSPC Minutes, 17 January 1939, TSPC.

contract stations on the southbound drive was 3.6 miles. At locations where the subsoil was marshy and heavy fill was required,  $\frac{3}{4}$ " deformed steel ties spanned longitudinal construction joints at the bottom of the concrete slab, stretching 5'-0" center-to-center. Manholes 2'-0" in diameter over brick or 1/2/4-mixture concrete field inlets provided an extra source of drainage in the wet and unstable soil. This section was graded for a slope of 1 on 3 in the open terrain of southern Dutchess County.<sup>180</sup>

As the parkway continued north through Dutchess County, grade separation structures were erected at major roads and at stream and creek crossings. The Frank Wescott Construction Company of North Attleboro, Massachusetts erected bridges over the Noxon-LaGrangeville Road and over Sprout Creek and Jackson Creek at an approximate cost of \$126,792. A grade separation underpass was erected at the Mid-County Highway (NY 82) by the Patterson & Rossi Construction Company of Torrington, Connecticut and featured typical rustic stone masonry, posts and copings consistent with earlier parkway bridge designs.<sup>181</sup>

Parkway construction advanced rapidly between 1936 and 1939. The TSPC also acquired three large parcels of land to augment the park system in the Taconic region. Recreational facilities along the parkway became popular destinations as city drivers traveled farther into the upstate countryside. James Baird State Park in LaGrange, more than 500 acres in size, was partially located within the parkway right-of-way and the parkway passed through the park near its eastern boundary. A golf course, swimming pool and picnic areas were built to serve day visitors. A clubhouse, built by CCC labor, included a restaurant and lounge, a pro shop and locker rooms for men and women. Combining wood shingles, mortared field stonewalls, and a handsomely detailed interior with knotty pine walls, the Baird Clubhouse was built at an approximate cost of \$25,000.<sup>182</sup>

#### Parkway Construction: 1941-49

By 1940 the TSCP was well established in Dutchess County and work on the section from NY 55 north to the old Dutchess Turnpike, NY 44, was underway. Taking the road as far north as NY 55 brought the parkway into the larger transportation system serving southeastern New York. Drivers could cross the Hudson River at the new Mid-Hudson Bridge in Poughkeepsie and traffic counts reflected the parkway's increasing popularity as a through route. A significant increase in vehicular traffic from 1939 to 1940 demonstrated that the parkway had become an important transit corridor, not restricted to weekend pleasure drives but used heavily on a daily basis.<sup>183</sup>

Two gas stations were erected to serve this steady traffic. The Shenandoah station, built by the W.W. Kingston Company of Poughkeepsie, opened for business in February 1940. A service station at Todd Hill near Arthursburg Road was completed in 1942. Both stations were located

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<sup>180</sup> "Record Plans, Region 8, TSP 33-1 through 62-1," NYDOT.

<sup>181</sup> TSPC Minutes, 27 August 1938, TSPC.

<sup>182</sup> TPSC Minutes, 18 October 1937, TSPC.

<sup>183</sup> Between 1939 and 1940 traffic counts increased from 46,158 to 52,337 vehicles per day. TSPC Minutes, 13 July 1940, TSPC.

in the median, allowing access from both northbound and southbound driveways. The stations sold gas and oil and employed mechanics to perform minor repairs. Parkway gas stations were owned by the TSPC and operated by concessionaires. The TSPC collected a percentage of gas sales in addition to monthly rents. Shenandoah station was much more modest than the Briarcliff Wells station, which had been built adjacent to the Bronx Parkway Extension in the late 1920s. Briarcliff Wells was a sumptuously designed full-service facility, including gas pumps, a garage, and a restaurant and bar. The Shenandoah and Todd Hill service stations were relatively spartan facilities, but they were carefully designed to evoke local building traditions. The new service stations proved unsuccessful financially as the wartime economy, gas and tire rationing, and travel restrictions affected traffic volumes, which dropped precipitously and caused several stations to close until traffic returned to pre-war levels.<sup>184</sup>

The War Department recognized the parkway's centrality to the transportation systems in the northeast when it designated the road a military highway in December 1941. At the request of Major General Irving J. Phillipson, commander of the Second Corps Area (metropolitan New York), Robert Moses called a meeting of regional parkway commissions "to confer on park, parkway, arterial and related matters." Moses directed commissioners of the Palisades Interstate Park Commission, the Long Island State Park Commission and the TSPC to furnish the War Department with bridge load, clearance and alternate route information in light of the national emergency. While Moses complied with military requirements to use parkways for troop movements, he remained firm in his commitment that "the character of parkways must be protected" lest they "degenerate into through traffic routes" allowing mixed traffic. A state police station adjacent to the Bronx Parkway Extension (now officially part of the TSP) in Millwood, Westchester County, issued notifications to the TSPC when troop movements along the parkway were anticipated.<sup>185</sup> While convoys of military trucks carrying troops, supplies and equipment traveled on the parkway during the war years, commercial buses were still prohibited and the TSPC reiterated the parkway's classification as a passenger-only roadway. The commission resolved that "unless and until any benefit to the war effort clearly outweighs resulting damage" caused by commercial traffic, the statewide policy restricting the road to private passenger vehicles would remain in force.<sup>186</sup>

The strategically important Croton Bridge, spanning New York's City's water supply in Westchester County, would be protected by armed guards. The parkway was also subject to a "Lights Out" order by the War Department. In May 1942 all parkway lighting with the exception of the Croton Bridge lights were eliminated for the duration of the war. Speed limits on the parkway were reduced from 40 mph to 35 mph to comply with wartime gasoline and

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<sup>184</sup> Kesebec, Inc. and Socony Vacuum Oil, operators of the parkway gas stations, applied for "relief" in June 1942, and, upon approval by the State Council of Parks, the TSPC altered the terms of their lease, allowing the contractors to operate on a month-to-month basis. By 1943, the TSPC approved temporary closure of the Todd Hill, Shrub Oak and Fahnestock Park gas stations. TSPC Minutes, 30 June 1942 and 20 July 1943, TSPC.

<sup>185</sup> In response to a request to bus British sailors on leave and encamped at Fahnestock Park to Columbia County to assist in the apple harvest in the fall of 1943, Moses granted a rare exception to parkway rules governing access. TSPC Minutes, 21 September 1943, TSPC.

<sup>186</sup> TSPC Minutes, 15 September 1942, TSPC.

rubber rationing efforts. Parkway construction projects were deferred, though budget allocations were provided to support routine maintenance. Much of the parkway maintenance budget between 1942 and 1945 was spent on snow removal and mowing; other maintenance was "kept to a minimum in order to save tires, gasoline and manpower."<sup>187</sup> Parks, too, were altered by the war. The abandoned CCC camp at Lake Taghkanic State Park housed young women employed by the Columbia County Farm Bureau to assist with summer crop harvests.<sup>188</sup>

An amended version of Assemblyman Stephens's parkway construction bill, originally vetoed by Governor Lehman, was successfully reintroduced in the 1941 legislative session. It allocated \$3.6 million in construction funds to carry the parkway north to Columbia County and transferred the jurisdiction of the two Westchester sections from the WCPC to the TSPC. While construction ceased during the war years, the Stephens bill accelerated the rate of parkway planning. The TSPC contracted with the New York City-based engineering firm Madigan & Hyland to assist in the preparation of construction plans in northern Dutchess County. Winslow brought an administrative secretary on board to assist with the mounting responsibilities of the commission's expanding domain. With the Westchester County mileage included in the TSPC's jurisdiction, an inventory of all Westchester, Putnam, and Dutchess county at-grade intersections was conducted. The study focused on the most dangerous Westchester County at-grade intersections and on provisions to allow improved parkway connections with the Hutchinson River and Saw Mill River parkways, which had been added to Westchester's parkway network in the 1930s.<sup>189</sup>

The most pressing problem was the Hawthorne Interchange, where Westchester's Saw Mill River Parkway, NY 100, and the Bronx Parkway Extension converged. By 1941, it was clear that the existing rotary configuration was no longer capable of efficiently accommodating existing traffic demands. Accidents were frequent and back-ups were commonplace. The study recommended that the existing traffic circle be reconstructed as a grade separated interchange.<sup>190</sup> Plans were also discussed to eliminate the most dangerous of the Westchester intersections, but lacking the funds to enact these design improvements, the commission resolved to erect uniform stop signs at each of these intersections "in order to provide better control of parkway traffic."<sup>191</sup>

The TSPC also assumed control of the Bear Mountain Parkway, which, when completed, would replace U.S. 6 as the primary link to the Bear Mountain Bridge in Peekskill. In 1941 little work had been accomplished on the Bear Mountain Parkway, but by 1942 construction was progressing under the direction of the DPW, which had let contracts for the work based on plans prepared by the WCPC several years earlier. The Bear Mountain Parkway was never completed, despite postwar plans to commit \$500,000 for the project. The difficulty of putting the Bear Mountain Parkway through a heavily developed residential and commercial district in the

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<sup>187</sup> New York State Conservation Department, *Annual Report* (n.p. 1944), 201.

<sup>188</sup> TSPC Minutes, 18 May 1943, TSPC.

<sup>189</sup> TSPC Minutes 16 September 1941, TSPC.

<sup>190</sup> The estimated expense for re-construction of the Hawthorne Interchange was \$1,041,000. TSPC Minutes 21 November 1944, TSPC.

<sup>191</sup> TSPC Minutes, 21 October 1941, TSPC.

vicinity of Peekskill proved to be an insurmountable obstacle. In fact, the land through which the Bear Mountain Parkway was supposed to pass was so heavily settled that plans had prepared to construct a parallel service road for local traffic. The service road would provide parkway access at pre-ordained entry points and would prevent private driveways intersecting with the parkway. The Bear Mountain Parkway project proved so vexing that the commission attempted to abandon responsibility for it. In the summer of 1950 the TSPC proposed transferring its jurisdiction to the DPW in order to redefine the roadway as a state highway. The partially completed parkway was already functioning as a mixed-use highway accommodating commercial and private passenger vehicles. Its completion as a parkway appeared unlikely. Even the DPW was discouraged with the project, committing engineers to the job "only as fill-in work when men are available."<sup>192</sup>

Though parkway construction ceased during the war years and routine maintenance was limited, planning activities continued. Between 1941 and 1945, planning focused on postwar projects, including the reconstruction of Westchester County at-grade intersections and the extension of the TSP into Columbia County. Following an April 1945 meeting between the State Council of Parks and the DPW, Moses issued revised standards for postwar parkway design. North of NY 199, TSP driveways would be constructed as dual 12'-0" lanes with 6'-0" shoulders on underpasses and 10'-0" shoulders on both cut and fill sections. Clearances on parkway underpasses from the edge of the pavement to the face of the center pier and the face of the abutment would be 3'-0" to 4'-0". On parkway overpasses, clearances were required to be 3'-6" from the edge of the pavement to parapet, with sidewalks where necessary. Bridge clearances on the center lanes would be 14'-2" to preclude passage by trucks and buses. Clearance at the curb would be 12'-8". Median widths of 10'-0" on overpasses and underpasses were considered "desirable"; 6'-0" of safety median was the absolute minimum.<sup>193</sup>

The uniform design standards were intended to ensure that the parkway would continue to function as a scenic pleasure drive while safely and efficiently accommodating higher speeds and greater traffic volumes. While the basic character of the project remained the same, the parkway's ultimate destination continued to be a matter of debate. In 1942, State Highway Commissioner H. O. Schermerhorn suggested that proposed highway construction in the Albany capital district meant that the parkway might be "more useful" if located nearer to Albany. Schermerhorn proposed a route in northern Columbia County that stretched due north from the village of Chatham, through Old Chatham and on to Malden Bridge before turning west in southern Rensselaer County. The commissioner believed that the TSP should connect with a proposed new Hudson River bridge south of Albany.<sup>194</sup>

TSPC Vice Chairman Howland Davis inspected the proposed relocation and noted that farmlands in the area were being intensively cultivated and grazed. The proposed right-of-way would sever many of these farm fields, while the need for additional railroad and stream crossing bridges would increase construction as well as land acquisition costs. Due to these

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<sup>192</sup> TSPC Minutes, 18 September 1950, TSPC.

<sup>193</sup> TSPC Minutes, 21 May 1945, TSPC.

<sup>194</sup> TSPC Minutes, 19 May 1942, TSPC.

considerations, the commission disapproved of the relocation but prepared a preliminary study and estimate of construction costs.<sup>195</sup>

The commission's report stated that the proposed relocation would "not add to public convenience, or reduce the cost of construction and would have less scenic beauty and lower the present standards of state parkway construction." The TSPC resolved to continue the parkway on its present route. An inspection tour by Schermerhorn, DPW District Engineer Bixby, Columbia County Assemblyman Moffatt, Bowman, and Winslow in July 1943 resulted in the unanimous decision that the route outlined in the commission's original proposal should be retained.<sup>196</sup>

Parkway construction allocations resumed after World War II. The 1946-47 state budget provided \$3.57 million in parkway construction funds to supplement the \$3.6 million allocated in 1941 upon passage of the Stephens bill. These new funds allowed preparation of road and bridge plans, profiles and construction specifications for extending the parkway 21 miles through Dutchess County from NY 55 in Freedom Plains to NY 199 in the town of Milan. In January 1946 Arborio began work on the rough grading and structures contract for the section between NY 55 and NY 44. Peter Mitchell Construction Company of Greenwich, Connecticut was awarded the rough grading contract for the section between NY 44 at Washington Hollow and the town of Clinton Corners, a distance of approximately 8 miles. Mitchell's bid for the contract was \$1,056,554. Despite this marked increase in funding, however, political impediments and ambiguity surrounding the parkway's ultimate destination seriously delayed construction progress.<sup>197</sup>

#### Lake Taghkanic Controversy: 1945-49

Property surveys and route location studies had been proceeding in Columbia County since the mid 1920s. Following acquisition of the Livingston property, development of Lake Taghkanic State Park continued throughout the 1930s and early 1940s. Plans for the parkway alignment near Lake Taghkanic were based on the WCPC's example at Mohansic Park, where the Bronx Parkway Extension had been laid out to provide views of Mohansic Lake from the parkway drive as it passed through the park. When construction resumed in the late 1940s, Columbia County citizens organized to oppose the parkway location close to the lakeshore and protect their property from appropriation by the state. The "nuisance shacks" Niles had dismissed on his inspection tour in 1929 became the focal point in a prolonged battle to relocate the parkway away from Lake Taghkanic.<sup>198</sup>

In September 1945 the Lake Taghkanic Property Owners Association, led by attorney Michael LeSawyer, appeared before the TSPC. LeSawyer insisted the association was not opposed to the

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<sup>195</sup> TPSC Minutes, 15 September 1942 and 20 October 1942, TSPC.

<sup>196</sup> TSPC Minutes, 21 September 1943, TSPC.

<sup>197</sup> TSPC Minutes, 18 March 1946, TSPC.

<sup>198</sup> Niles discounted the local resort community at Lake Taghkanic as a collection of "nuisance shacks" in his 1929 inspection of the property. TSPC Minutes, 12 June 1929, TSPC.

parkway, which the members considered "very desirable."<sup>199</sup> The association did, however, oppose the parkway's projected route near the western shore of the lake, since this would require the removal of 110 privately owned cottages. Commissioner Howland Davis of Tivoli, in Dutchess County, defended the proposed parkway alignment, which passed within 75 yards of the lakeshore. Davis asserted that the TSPC was building a parkway "for the exclusive use of motor conveyances classed as pleasure vehicles" and argued that the road's impact on the lake's recreational qualities would be "minimal." He reminded LeSawyer that the cottage owners had enjoyed free access to the lake only since it was acquired by the state.<sup>200</sup>

LeSawyer urged the commission to relocate the parkway route in the Lake Taghkanic vicinity, noting that "a vast tract of land to the west of the proposed parkway" was available at a "reasonable price." Davis countered that the cottage owners and "most of Columbia County" had long been aware of the TSPC's plans to route the parkway to Lake Taghkanic State Park, asserting that it was common knowledge that "it has always been a policy of the state to connect its parks with the parkway system." The TSPC resolved to stay the course and locate the parkway so as to present roadside views of the lake. The meeting adjourned, but in the following weeks a petition formally expressing opposition to the parkway route was circulated among residents and delivered to the commission. As the debate over the Lake Taghkanic section threatened to grow into a major political controversy, Winslow prepared a press release communicating the commission's viewpoint. Seeking to gain support from those who were not fortunate enough to own vacation property on Lake Taghkanic, he insisted that "any damage [suffered] by [a] small group will far outweigh the benefit which will accrue to Columbia County and the neighboring city of Hudson . . . from an outstanding park area for the use and enjoyment of the entire neighborhood."<sup>201</sup>

Columbia County State Assemblyman Fred Washburn, a veteran of Albany politics who had served for fifteen years on the Assembly Rules Committee and was a popular Republican from the city of Hudson, soon joined the fray. Washburn proclaimed, "Columbia County should be permitted to retain some of its old natural beauty. I don't see why [the TSPC] should take over everything."<sup>202</sup> Washburn authored legislation, co-sponsored by State Senator Charles Bontecou, intending to protect the interests of the seasonal cottage owners. The Washburn-Bontecou bill would prohibit the TSPC from acquiring any property within 250 yards of the lakeshore, require a new parkway alignment, and prevent the commission from appropriating any of the seasonal cottages. In April 1946 Governor Dewey signed Washburn's bill into law, forcing the commission to prepare a new parkway alignment in southern Columbia County. Though Moses appealed to Dewey on the commission's behalf, the Washburn-Bontecou Act remained law.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> TSPC Minutes, 10 September 1945.

<sup>200</sup> TSPC Minutes, 10 September 1945.

<sup>201</sup> *Chatham Courier* (New York), 26 November 1945, 4.

<sup>202</sup> *Hudson Evening Star* (New York), 5 December 1945, 2.

<sup>203</sup> TSPC Minutes 20 May 1946, TSPC.

The TSPC turned to its old ally, Putnam County Assemblyman D. Mallory Stephens, to draft a bill to repeal the Washburn Act. Stephens's proposed legislation represented a compromise: it would grant the TSPC authority to acquire property at Lake Taghkanic without stipulating the road's alignment near the lakeshore. Stephens's bill died in committee before reaching the assembly floor. The TSPC considered a further compromise, and Stephens drafted an amendment to his bill that would allow Lake Taghkanic property to be transferred to the state by gift or purchase. Before the amended bill could be considered, however, the Lake Taghkanic property owners took the offensive.<sup>204</sup>

C. Burton Hartshorn, a resident of Columbia County, wrote an open letter to the TSPC accusing the commission of "ignoring the will of the State Legislature." Hartshorn complained that the commission had a responsibility "to push the parkway forward," yet it appeared to be engaging in "a sit down strike against the supreme power of the state." Hartshorn charged the TSPC with "needlessly destroying the only recreational area in southern Columbia County to put down strips of concrete."<sup>205</sup>

Hartshorn's letter was a masterful piece of rhetoric but his argument was far from irrefutable. The TSPC was proposing to develop Lake Taghkanic as a state park—building a bathing beach and bathhouse, erecting comfortable rental cabins with kitchens and fireplaces, and constructing an extensive trail system in the woods surrounding the lake. As a state park, Lake Taghkanic would be made available to the public at large, not restricted to use by private cottage owners. Though building the parkway within 75 yards of the lakeshore certainly would have detracted from the rustic character of the park, the TSPC was providing a much-needed public recreational facility in Columbia County.

The Lake Taghkanic controversy again raised the issue of the parkway's perceived audience by calling attention to the conflicting desires of local residents and urban motorists. The TSPC clearly had few qualms about sacrificing a long-standing regional recreational tradition to provide attractive lakeside views for urbanites fleeing the big city in search of picturesque scenery. A through route originating in suburban New York and providing attractive views of a charming upstate lake was of obvious benefit to city drivers seeking recreational travel; but in rural Columbia County, it represented less a disturbance to local transportation and recreation traditions. As in Dutchess County, a limited-access scenic pleasure drive had little utility for local residents. While the TSPC got its way in the end, the Washburn Act held parkway construction plans hostage for more than two years. According to the terms of the legislation, the parkway could not proceed north from NY 199 until the final location of the parkway in the vicinity of Lake Taghkanic was determined.<sup>206</sup>

Winslow turned his attention to the subject of extending the parkway further north into Rensselaer County. Rensselaer County offered a wealth of recreational and scenic opportunities,

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<sup>204</sup> TSPC Minutes, 16 February 1948, TSPC.

<sup>205</sup> Hartshorn's protest was published in its entirety in the *Poughkeepsie Sunday New Yorker*, the *Hudson Daily Star* and the *Chatham Courier*, 28 April 1948.

<sup>206</sup> The Washburn-Bontecou bill was enacted as a law under Chapter 986, Laws of 1946.

containing sixty-five lakes in a region within easy driving distance of Albany. Winslow compared area to England's Lake District, pointing out that "the most handsome and impressive part of the Taconic Range" lay within Rensselaer County. Seeking to avoid a repeat of the ongoing Columbia County controversy, Winslow asserted, "Before it is too late the fine scenery in Rensselaer County should be protected against encroachment of billboards, hotdog stands, and undesirable developments similar to the conditions at Lake Taghkanic."<sup>207</sup>

As the TSPC maintained its efforts to continue the TSP northward, a new regional transportation plan was beginning to affect the project's future. Following passage of the Defense Highways Act of 1941, New York State began planning a high-speed roadway, or "thruway," that would extend through the center of the state, linking distant population centers with each other and with the metropolitan area. Stretching from metropolitan New York to Lake Erie, the thruway was planned in several sections. The "Catskills Thruway" would travel north from the metropolitan region through the western Hudson Valley to an intersection with the "Berkshire Thruway" near Albany. The Berkshire Thruway would extend east to the Massachusetts border, providing a connection from Albany to Boston via the Massachusetts Turnpike. From Albany, the "Mohawk Thruway" would stretch west through the central tier of the state to the Pennsylvania border at Lake Erie. A \$50 million appropriation to the DPW in 1946-47 represented the scale of the intended project which, when built, was expected to extend 486 miles and cost an estimated \$840 million. Designed for utilitarian travel rather than leisurely sightseeing, the thruway would be constructed with different design speeds and landscaping considerations; recreational facilities would be kept to a minimum or dispensed with entirely.<sup>208</sup>

Parkway construction was soon subordinated to thruway planning, which could be presented as having more broad-reaching utilitarian functions. As Winslow noted in the spring of 1946, the preparation of parkway construction plans "stopped as the DPW [was] instructed to give precedence to thruway and highway construction plans."<sup>209</sup> Though it appeared that thruway planning would further delay parkway construction as the commission awaited legislative determination of the parkway corridor near Lake Taghkanic, the TSPC and State Parks Council Chairman Moses cast construction of the thruway as an opportunity rather than an impediment to parkway planning. In June 1945 Moses proposed a parkway construction schedule to advance the TSP through northern Dutchess and into Columbia County, connected at each stage with county and state highways. Following a northerly course it would reach NY 199 in the spring of 1947, connect with NY 82 by the end of the year, and extend to NY 23 in northern Columbia County by the summer of 1948. Moses envisioned the parkway reaching the Berkshire Thruway by 1950.<sup>210</sup>

With a connection to the Berkshire Thruway as its new goal, the TSPC had a reinvigorated mandate to extend the parkway beyond NY 199 in northern Dutchess County, where planning and construction had come to a halt with the Lake Taghkanic controversy. A northern terminus

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<sup>207</sup> TSPC Minutes 21 October 1946, TSPC.

<sup>208</sup> "New York State Builds Its Thruway," *Engineering News-Record* 131 (23 January 1947), 103-107.

<sup>209</sup> TSPC Minutes, 20 May 1946, TSPC.

<sup>210</sup> TPSC Minutes, 18 June 1945, TSPC.

at the Berkshire Thruway presupposed a conceptual transformation in the parkway's purpose, however. Rather than continuing north into Rensselaer as the spine of an expansive regional recreation system, the thruway terminus would recast the parkway as a component of the regional highway system. The proposed connection with the Berkshire Thruway would increase demands on the scenic parkway to function as a high-speed transportation corridor accommodating through traffic.

In contrast to Taconic State Parkway, the New York State Thruway was planned to accommodate 60-mph speeds for all classes of vehicles—private cars, buses, and trucks. Its alignment was laid out with a 20'-0"-wide median and with maximum grades of 3 percent. As a scenic pleasure drive, the TSP had a lower speed limit and was designed accordingly, with sharper curves, steeper grades, and an emphasis on providing a stimulating variety of scenery and driving experience rather than the mind-numbing-though-arguably-safer-and-more-efficient standardization that characterized modern highway construction. In 1946, TSP speed limits were set at 45 mph from the Hawthorne Circle to the Putnam County border and at 50 mph through Putnam and Dutchess County sections. Throughout Dutchess County, the TSP's vertical grades varied between a minimum of .8 percent and a maximum of 7.2 percent. The lengths of horizontal curves ranged from 1,800'-0" to 12,277'-0", requiring greater attention on the part of motorists, but reflecting the gently undulating terrain of the mid-Hudson Valley.<sup>211</sup>

While the decision to link the TSP with the Berkshire Thruway provided impetus to break the existing stalemate and continue the parkway northward, it spelled the end of the dream of extending the project as far as the Canadian border; the proposed connection to the Tri-State Park also took a back seat and was soon abandoned. A 1949-50 budget request to undertake surveys and proceed with development plans for the Tri-State Park was disapproved by the State Council. This decision was based on the lack of "definite information" from Massachusetts and Connecticut park planners that these states intended to join in the development of the proposed Tri-State Park. The Berkshire Thruway remained the parkway's northern terminus.<sup>212</sup>

#### Parkway Construction: 1948-63

The Lake Taghkanic issue was resolved in April 1949, when Stephens's amended bill failed to pass in Albany. While the TSPC was forced to re-route the parkway away from the lake, the park itself was expanded and the summer camps were to become property of the state. Homeowners were granted lifetime seasonal occupancy of their cottages and the intervening property between the lake and the new parkway location was encompassed within park boundaries. The \$3.6 million construction allocation of 1943 was finally made available, but the decision to revise the parkway alignment was estimated to increase costs by more than \$1 million. Bowman and DPW engineers began to prepare plans to carry the road approximately 1 mile south and west of the lake shore and north to NY 82, near West Taghkanic in Columbia County.

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<sup>211</sup> "Record Plans, Region 8, TSP-45-3 through 62-2," NYSDOT.

<sup>212</sup> TSPC Minutes, 21 March 1949, TSPC.

With the resolution of the Lake Taghkanic controversy, planning and construction proceeded with renewed resolve on an ambitious schedule. The TSPC let bids for paving the parkway between NY 55 and NY 199 in June 1948.<sup>213</sup> Arborio was the rough-grading contractor for this section and began work in the fall of 1947. Pending the determination of the parkway route near Lake Taghkanic, however, no funds were released to let a contract for paving until the summer of 1948. The exposed cuts and fills along the rough-graded road had begun to erode and required extra work to stabilize the exposed earth. The DPW also reconsidered the issue of paving materials at this time, recommending that the paving contract allow for a choice between reinforced concrete pavement and asphalt pavement. The TSPC received three bids: two were submitted for reinforced concrete pavement and one for bituminous concrete or "asphalt" pavement. Arborio was awarded the paving contract, having submitted the low bid of \$4,610,524 for reinforced concrete, which was some \$200,000 below the bid for asphalt pavement submitted by B. Perini & Son, Inc. of Framingham, Massachusetts. By the summer of 1949, Arborio's men had completed paving more than 16 of the 21 miles between NY 55 and NY 199 and would finish the job in time to open the road to the public in October.<sup>214</sup> This section included a service station located in the median in Clinton Corners and the only eastern overlook built on the parkway, straddling the border between the towns of Clinton and Stanford.

The parkway curb system employed a distinctive design in the postwar construction era. A special cast-in-place, hand-fluted, mountable and reflective curb added a new level of safety. Earlier sections had featured a cast-in-place barrier curb. The evolution to a mountable curb reflected a fundamental shift in roadway design based on the higher speeds of the era. Rather than bouncing errant vehicles back into the roadway in the manner of the old vertical barrier curb, the new angled curb allowed drivers to recover with a greater degree of control if they drifted to the edge of the road. Open grassy shoulders averaging 8' wide provided an extra measure of safety should the vehicle veer off the parkway drive. A bright white reflective paint was applied to the curbs to increase visibility for night drivers. Defining a clear boundary between the driveway and the park, curbs had a sculptural effect as well as a practical function. Curbs gave the impression of a roadway being carved out of the landscape rather than laid upon it.

The reflecting mountable curb was constructed in special forms and tied at 5'-0" intervals to the inside driving lane with a system of  $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 7" machine bolts with iron sleeves along a continuous tongue and groove joint. The concrete curbs were spread with white mortar and a scoring tool attached to the wooden side form notched  $\frac{1}{4}$ " to  $\frac{1}{2}$ " flutes along the angled surface of the curb. This was a labor-intensive process and resulted in a handcrafted appearance. Construction specifications allowed a variation in the angle of reflection and depth of scoring to result in "a rhythmic series in accordance with a plan to be approved by the engineer." The fluted mortar was then painted with a metallic reflecting white paint.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Though Stephens's bill had not yet reached the assembly floor in the summer of 1948, its passage seemed unlikely. Letting bids for the paving contract before the legislature ruled on the parkway location near Lake Taghkanic revealed that the TSPC was determined to resume construction at the earliest possible date.

<sup>214</sup> TSPC Minutes, 15 July 1949, TSPC.

<sup>215</sup> "Record Plans, Region 8, TSP 48-1, Sheet 6," NYDOT.

While engineering innovations were advancing to improve safe driving conditions, timber guide rail was still used in the immediate post-war construction era. It was slightly altered, however, so that stronger black locust posts, between 9" and 11" in diameter placed 8'-0" center on center supported 3'-0" x 8" x 16" West Coast Douglas fir or dense yellow pine beams secured to the posts with 7" galvanized or copperweld wire spikes. Posts were set at a depth of 4" below grade, except in rock foundations, where they were sunk 2'-3" deep. These modifications over the earlier post and beam system resulted in more stable guiderails designed for higher parkway driving speeds.<sup>216</sup>

A uniform design for parkway bridges was developed in the late 1940s to ensure that modern steel-frame bridges would emulate the earlier concrete-arch bridges. Specifications for stone-faced bridges included precise instructions to obtain an appearance that would "represent the best type of stone work in the old structures constructed of bluestone in Dutchess and Ulster Counties." The dimensions of stones on bridge faces were required to be three times as long as they were wide. "Slight irregularities" were desired so as to avoid perfect rectangles, while a slight variation in color added to the naturalistic appearance of the masonry work. Stones were cut on site and laid up in a mixture of one part mortar and two parts sand. Joints between the stones were to be of "variable" width, though not to exceed  $\frac{3}{4}$ ". The contractor was instructed to refer to Dutchess County buildings that had been identified as having "a type of stonework that will be satisfactory to be used as a pattern."<sup>217</sup> The rigid-frame overpass bridge at the Salt Point Turnpike interchange in the town of Pleasant Valley was designed to these standards in 1944, as were two underpass bridges erected at the parkway interchange with James Baird State Park in LaGrange.

On 17 October 1949 the latest stretch of the parkway opened to the public. Governor Dewey cut through the ceremonial chain over the parkway with a hand-held blowtorch as the TSPC, Moses, and DPW officials looked on. In anticipation of this event the TSPC produced a commemorative brochure describing the parkway as "a composite of safety, sightliness and utility." It had taken eight years and approximately \$7 million to build the 21-mile section between NY 55 in Freedom Plains to NY 199 in Lafayetteville. The TSPC expressed pride that the new section "constitute[d] the largest single parkway section ever to be completed as a unit in New York State."<sup>218</sup> Observers noted that the parkway "represent[ed] every known facility for safe and modern parkway construction yet devised in creating the highway of the future."<sup>219</sup> At this point, the TSP stretched nearly 80 miles north of New York City, more than half the way to Albany.

In September 1951 the rough grading and structures contract for the section between NY 199 and NY 82 (in Columbia County) was awarded to the Lane Construction Company of Meriden, Connecticut. Work progressed rapidly and by December clearing and grubbing was completed.

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<sup>216</sup> "Record Plans, Region 8, TSP 53-2, Sheet 1 of 2," 1953, NYDOT.

<sup>217</sup> "Record Plans, Region 8, TSP 46-1, Sheet 12, bridge architectural details," NYSDOT.

<sup>218</sup> TSPC and NYSDPW, *Taconic State Parkway Extension*.

<sup>219</sup> "Scenic Beauty, Safety Combined in New Parkway Construction," *Poughkeepsie Sunday New Yorker*, 9 October 1949, 13-14.

A construction crew with an average of 100 laborers worked with ten trucks, two excavating shovels, four bulldozers, six compressors, a grader and two steamrollers. Grade separation bridges were erected at the interchange with NY 199 and a stream crossing bridge was built to carry the parkway over the Roeliff Jansen Kill. A service station was erected in the parkway median at Lake Taghkanic State Park and an overlook parking area was added near CR 8.<sup>220</sup>

As the terrain grew more open and rolling, the parkway began to spread out and occupy a broad right-of-way with a wide median averaging over 100' in width. The independent alignments of the northbound and southbound lanes followed the rolling topography, traversing gentle valleys and climbing major ridges. Vertical grades range from a minimum incline of .7 percent to a maximum of 7.0 percent in Columbia County. Horizontal curves were longer than those in Dutchess County, with radii between 2,913'-0" and 22,918'-0". The characteristically winding alignment and undulating profile through Dutchess County continued in the northern section, and views frequently expanded to capture vistas of the Catskill Mountain range. The parkway corridor blended seamlessly into the surrounding countryside, as stands of hardwood trees continued from the right-of-way to naturalistic groupings in the median.<sup>221</sup>

In October 1954 the section between NY 199 and NY 82 opened to traffic. Governor Dewey, who had done little to assist the parkway commission in its battle with the Lake Taghkanic Property Owners Association or with the Washburn Bill, presided over the opening ceremonies. Dewey declared that he was proud to live up to his promise, made at opening ceremonies at NY 199 exactly five years earlier, that he would be remembered as "the governor who got the parkway out of Dutchess County." Dewey's speech reflected little appreciation for parkway design, however, and he took the opportunity to stump for the rival thruway, then under construction. Though he appealed to the assembled crowd when he characterized the region as the most beautiful district in the entire country, he also called on planners and engineers to "straighten out the parkways."<sup>222</sup>

Robert Moses made a speech calling for extending the parkway to the Canadian border. Prospects of this ever happening were growing dimmer by the moment, however, as parkway development was rapidly being overshadowed by utilitarian freeway construction. The newly authorized Northway (I-87), which was to be constructed from Albany to the Canadian border on the west side of the Hudson, would fulfill the parkway's original mandate to carry motorists into the northernmost region of New York. Echoing Moses' statements, TSPC Chair Howland Davis cast the Northway as a "useful incentive" for pushing further construction of the Taconic to the Berkshire Thruway, but the prognosis was not hopeful.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> TSPC Minutes, 17 September 1951, 15 October 1951, 19 November 1951, 20 October 1952, 19 June 1953, and 18 October 1954, TSPC.

<sup>221</sup> "Record Plans, Region 8, TSP 33-1 through 62-1," NYDOT.

<sup>222</sup> Dewey was quoted in a special supplement showcasing the parkway corridor in the *Poughkeepsie Sunday New Yorker*, 17 October 1954.

<sup>223</sup> TSPC Minutes, 11 November 1957, TSPC.

In September 1954, White Oak Excavators, Inc. began rough grading work on the next section, extending the parkway approximately 8 miles between NY 82 and NY 23. This phase required the construction of two grade-separated interchanges. A steel-deck, concrete rigid-frame grade separation structure was built at the interchange for NY 23 and featured typical rough-cut stone masonry walls. A steel girder span overpass was erected at CR 35. An overlook parking area was constructed on both northbound and southbound drives, allowing sweeping views of the Hudson River Valley and the Catskill Mountain range on the western horizon.

Upon completion of rough grading in July 1956, the paving project awaited DPW funds, which were not released until the following spring. The delay centered on the question of whether this stretch of road would be constructed with asphalt or reinforced concrete. The DPW had recommended an asphalt surface and all TSPC members aside from Columbia County Commissioner Washburn concurred. Concrete pavement provided a certain measure of safety for night driving, as its light-colored surface was easier to see in the dark. While concrete was expensive to repair, it could last more than half a century. Asphalt was a much less durable material, but it was easy to repair or replace, provided a smooth riding surface, and was slightly less expensive to construct than reinforced concrete. The visual difference, however, was striking, and the transition from reinforced concrete to asphalt was a significant alteration in the parkway's appearance.<sup>224</sup>

On 17 May 1957 the paving contract for the eight miles from NY 82 at West Taghkanic to NY 23 in Martindale was awarded to Peckham Road Corporation. The DPW had estimated the expense to be approximately \$2.5 million, and Peckham's bid of \$1,837,439 for asphalt paving was significantly cheaper than the estimated \$2.7 million required for constructing a reinforced concrete surface. Road design for the parkway section between NY 55 and NY 199 also evolved slightly, so that 12'-0" lanes were separated by a median ranging between 50' and 100' wide, and turf shoulder widths averaged 8'. The construction method for asphalt pavement involved spreading a 3" foundation course of gravel over the prepared roadbed, which was then covered with a 4" course of bituminous asphalt. No reinforcing mesh supports were required beneath the asphalt. Its plasticity allowed for sub-base expansions and contractions in hot or cold weather. Reflecting mountable fluted curbs lined this section and a timber guiderail system maintained the stylistic continuity lost by the evolution from concrete to asphalt pavement.<sup>225</sup>

The segment, which proved to be the final section of the TSP, carried the parkway from NY 23 to the Berkshire Spur of the New York State Thruway. Built at an approximate cost of \$6.5 million, this 12-mile stretch of road included an overpass bridge at NY 217 and a dual overlook parking area in the town of Ghent. Construction was accomplished in two phases: the 4-mile distance between NY 23 and NY 203 and the remaining 8 miles to the Berkshire Spur. The D.V. Frione Construction Company of New Haven was awarded the rough grading contract for the first 4-mile section. Rough grading began in July 1959 and was completed in November 1961.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> TSPC Minutes 15 April 1957, TSPC.

<sup>225</sup> "Record Plans, Region 8, TSP 53-1P, Sheet 7 of 143," 1953, NYDOT.

<sup>226</sup> TSPC Minutes 18 May 1959, 15 June 1959, and 20 January 1961, TSPC.

The ground conditions in Columbia County called for special drainage systems. The section between NY 23 and NY 203 required additional drainage systems to accommodate large volumes of water seeping through surrounding rock. Culvert systems were designed with pipes ranging in size from 2" to 7" thick and 1'-0" to 5'-0" in diameter set in a 2" bed of tamped gravel. To assist in maintaining a solid sub-base, perforated concrete mix under drains were located along the roadway in ditches dug a minimum of 5'-0" deep. Concrete aprons 2'-0"-wide with flared metal ends directed the water away from the drainage pipes.<sup>227</sup>

Construction on the final link in the parkway's connection with the Berkshire Thruway began with the letting of the rough grading contract in August 1960. The Savin Brothers Construction Company of Bloomfield, Connecticut was awarded the contract for grading, drainage, and structures. With the completion of the Savin contract, asphalt paving work began on the parkway drives between NY 23 and NY 203 and was completed in March 1962, several months ahead of schedule. The Peckham Road Corporation was again hired to produce the parkway's asphalt pavement. The contractor accomplished this at an approximate cost of \$3,153,000 for the 8-mile section. The stretch between NY 203 and the parkway's northern terminus at the Berkshire Spur was completed in the fall of 1963. The completed Taconic State Parkway extended 105 miles from its southern terminus at the Kensico Plaza; however, forty years of planning and thirty-two years of construction would culminate, sadly, without celebration. Ceremonies scheduled for 25 November 1963 to commemorate completion of the TSP were cancelled as the nation mourned the death of President John F. Kennedy.

#### TACONIC STATE PARKWAY: DESIGN CHARACTER AND CRITICAL APPRAISALS

While the Taconic State Parkway was clearly based on design and planning principles pioneered by the WCPC, the TSP did not simply replicate earlier parkway developments. The TSP advanced parkway design in several key areas. The TSP's most significant advance was the systematic use of wide safety medians, which were integral to the design and conception of the parkway's northern sections and were eventually retrofitted into the southern sections when these were reconstructed in the 1960s. Before World War II, the most common approach to relieving congestion was to widen roads and add additional driving lanes. While wider roads allowed for increased capacity and higher speeds, they had little effect on improving safe driving conditions. Motorists continued to risk head-on collisions with opposing traffic. Median dividing strips greatly improved safety and made the driving experience significantly more relaxing. There were short sections of divided roadway on several prewar parkways, but even the storied WCPC employed the technique sparsely, due largely to the substantial cost increases mandated by the additional land acquisition required for divided roadway development.<sup>228</sup>

The Taconic State Parkway was planned with a 400' right-of-way, though in some sections it narrowed to 300' due to special agreements with property owners. In the 1930s the TSP's 400'-

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<sup>227</sup> "Record Plans, Region 8, TSP 62-1, Sheet 10 of 81," NYDOT.

<sup>228</sup> "Divided Highway Design -I," *Engineering News-Record* 123 (December 21, 1939): 816.

right-of-way was an especially large tract, even for a parkway corridor. Westchester's earlier parkways, including the Bronx River, Hutchinson River, and Sawmill River, had minimum rights-of-ways of 250', but Downer had insisted that a 300' minimum right-of-way was essential for modern parkway development. These broad rights-of-way were in marked contrast to traditional highways, where rights-of-way averaged between 80'-100'-wide in the 1930s.<sup>229</sup> Westchester's parkway program highlighted the importance of controlling the roadside environment for both safety and aesthetic purposes. This broad strip provided a visual barrier to existing and anticipated roadside development, but it was also an important safety feature. Wide rights-of-way also prevented cars from veering off the road and into developed and populated areas. An additional advantage was that they offered room for additional driving lanes should future growth call for road expansion.

The topography of Dutchess County was ideally suited for parkway design on this broader scale. Dutchess County's gentle hills and wide valleys, combined with a sparsely populated landscape of small farms, fields, and hardwood forests provided a more hospitable environment for design and construction than the TSP developers had encountered in the alternately mountainous and swampy conditions in Putnam County. The independent alignments and broad right-of-ways provided parkway designers with considerable freedom to adapt the roadways to the existing terrain and eliminate the unsightly cuts and fills that characterized conventional highway construction. Designers began to lay out the road with a median width varying between 50' and 100'. By taking full advantage of the 400' right-of-way and allowing the north- and south-bound roadways to pursue individual alignments around this variable-width median, the designers could accommodate topographical changes through subtle variations in grade and curvature. The wide median enhanced driver safety by reducing or eliminating problems associated with headlight glare from oncoming traffic. Variable width medians also eliminated the monotonous parallel track arrangement that characterized such leading examples of divided highway construction as the Pennsylvania Turnpike and the Nazi *Reichsautobahnen*.

Careful calculation of horizontal and vertical curvature served both aesthetic and engineering goals. Horizontal curvature on gradient changes was superelevated, or banked, to assist in drainage and to counteract centrifugal force on moving cars. On crests and sags in the vertical alignment, horizontal curvature was located so as to reduce blind spots at the summit of hills and to eliminate sharp turns in valleys. Transitions in vertical grades and on horizontal curves were also designed to enhance safety and aesthetics. Sharp transitions between grades could result in hazardous driving conditions, where sag or crest curves created blind spots for drivers. Short-radii horizontal curves presented problems when they were connected to short tangents (straight sections) so that motorists were forced to make frequent sharp directional adjustments.<sup>230</sup> Parkway designers addressed these problems by eliminating sharp curves and carefully calculating the relationship between vertical and horizontal alignment. A series of wide-radii curves ranging in length from 1,800'-0" to 12,277'-0" connected to short tangents resulted in a

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<sup>229</sup> "Divided Highway Design -I," 819.

<sup>230</sup> See Tunnard and Pushkarev, *Man-Made America*, 159-275.

graceful serpentine alignment following the natural landforms. Reflecting the gentler terrain, vertical grades achieve a maximum incline of 7.2 percent in Dutchess County.<sup>231</sup>

These design elements combined to create a safe and attractive road that provided drivers with constantly changing visual experiences. Views were foreshortened in valleys and on upgrades. On downgrades, views expanded to capture the distant horizon. Changes in the horizontal alignment also affected the driver's experience of the road in the landscape. Horizontal curves focused the drivers' view beyond the pavement. In open terrain, these curves provided sweeping vistas of fields and distant mountains; in more densely forested areas, attention focused on bordering trees, rock outcrops, and other roadside features. A planned sequence of views showcased the regional landscape. Bridges and overlooks were located to showcase vistas of the surrounding countryside. The single-arched suspension bridge over the Croton Reservoir mirrored the landforms of the gently rising Manhattan Hills in Westchester County. The rugged terrain of the Hudson Highlands in Putnam County contained the road in a narrow corridor through a series of steeply rising and sharply falling hills and hollows. Occasional glimpses through a screen of trees offered views of small lakes and broad valleys. Through Dutchess and Columbia counties, views of small farms and wooded hillsides were incorporated into the parkway's design. Overlooks were constructed where particularly distant and dramatic views were available.

The landscape at the road's edge was often heavily manipulated by the parkway's landscape architects, but planting arrangements were calculated to ensure that the parkway right-of-way blended seamlessly with the surrounding countryside. The broad medians were also developed along naturalistic principles. Informal groupings of native specimen trees and shrubs minimized the appearance of artificiality, while meadows and woods were alternated to showcase the variety of local landscapes. Naturalistic rock outcrops were retained in order to provide scenic interest and limit disturbances to the existing landscape. Cladding on bridge faces, on retaining walls, and at overlooks employed native stone and was designed to meld naturally into the parkway landscape. The stylistic unity of parkway features—curbs, guide rails, and service stations—served as a counterpoint to the changing landscape along the parkway's territory.

Landscaping opportunities were so exciting that Vassar College Dean of the School of Botany Edith Roberts and the Poughkeepsie Garden Club's Ecological Roadside Planting Committee enthusiastically offered their services to the TSPC. Though no records were discovered reflecting their formal participation in landscape plans, Professor Roberts was appointed "honorary landscape consultant."<sup>232</sup> The TSP's designers were so successful at enhancing existing vegetation and preserving natural landscape features that the parkway corridor was often more attractive than the surrounding landscape or even the individual recreation areas through which it passed. The parkway's striking visual quality apparently made the roadside itself an

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<sup>231</sup> "Record Plans, Region 8, TSP 33-1 through 62-1," NYDOT.

<sup>232</sup> Webb recommended Roberts be appointed honorary landscape consultant "based upon her great familiarity with the flora, fauna, field and other conditions of Dutchess County." TSPC Minutes, 19 November 1934, TSPC.

irresistible, though illegal, picnicking location. The state police issued many tickets to drivers violating the prohibition on roadside parking.

Despite its timeless naturalistic appearance, the TSP utilized state-of-the-art highway engineering principles and construction techniques. Parkway bridges generally employed the rigid-frame method of bridge construction introduced by Arthur Hayden in Westchester County. The Croton Reservoir Bridge was a particularly striking engineering innovation. When completed in 1931, it was the longest triple-hinged single-arch suspension bridge in the world. The parkway's hand-fluted reflecting curb was another advanced design technique. The parkway's smooth, gently undulating pavement prompted the authors of a 1959 Bureau of Public Roads study to assert that it possessed the "best riding qualities" of all the roads tested "throughout the United States."<sup>233</sup>

The TSP was widely regarded as a landmark in parkway design and was frequently presented as a model for divided highway development in general. An influential 1963 treatise on American landscape development presented the TSP as "the ultimate harmony of art and nature" and proclaimed it "undoubtedly the most beautiful and dramatic" freeway in the United States.<sup>234</sup> Harvard Professor Norman Newton hailed it as "the pinnacle of achievement in recreational travelways," while another historian cast it as "one of the proudest achievements of American road-building."<sup>235</sup> The prominent historian, planner, and critic Lewis Mumford characterized the TSP as "a consummate work of art . . . on a par with our highest creations in other fields."<sup>236</sup> A recent popular history of American road development reiterated the contention that the TSP's engaging surroundings and sophisticated yet subtle design made it "the most beautiful of all New York parkways."<sup>237</sup>

#### PARKWAY MODIFICATIONS: 1954-99

While each section of the TSP embodied the latest principles in parkway development at the time of construction, rapidly increasing traffic demands on the southern segments created a need for changes to the original designs. As construction proceeded through rural Columbia County in the 1950s, pressure increased for improvements in the parkway's suburban Westchester sections. The original Bronx Parkway Extension, which had been constructed as an undivided four-lane parkway with numerous at-grade intersections, could no longer accommodate the heavy traffic volumes generated by the burgeoning population of the surrounding suburbs. By the late 1950s the TSPC also had a new parkway development to consider: construction on the Sprain Brook

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<sup>233</sup> The Bureau of Public Roads conducted tests on recently constructed bituminous concrete (asphalt) roads in use for at least one year and noted the superior riding qualities of the parkway between Routes 82A and 23. TSPC Minutes, 16 May 1960, TSPC.

<sup>234</sup> Tunnard and Pushkarev, *Man-Made America*, 167.

<sup>235</sup> Newton, *Design on the Land*, 610; and Geoffry Hindlay, *A History of Roads* (Secaucus, NY: Citadel Press, 1972), 116.

<sup>236</sup> Lewis Mumford, *The Highway and the City* (New York: Harcourt-Brace, 1963), 236.

<sup>237</sup> Lewis, *Divided Highways*, 238.

Parkway began in 1958. This new commuter-oriented parkway was designed to intersect with the TSP at the Hawthorne Interchange, bringing additional traffic into an already over-crowded and increasingly inefficient system. In an effort to alleviate these problems, the TSPC contracted with the New York City-based Blauvelt Engineering Company to conduct a study of proposed parkway reconstruction projects, including removal of the Hawthorne traffic circle, the construction of grade separation structures at the busiest Westchester intersections, and the addition of supplementary driving lanes between Hawthorne and Yorktown. The cost for these large-scale projects was estimated in 1954 to exceed \$25 million.<sup>238</sup>

While the TSPC recognized the need for design improvements, particularly in Westchester County, its financial resources were stretched thin and its original mission was increasingly threatened by the growing pressure to transform the TSP into a high-volume commuter corridor. Nevertheless, the commission did what it could to alleviate the most pressing problems. Large-scale projects were considered, but the need to eliminate a dangerous at-grade crossing at Underhill Road was the most immediate concern. A grade separation structure, designed by Gilmore Clarke, was erected in 1954 at Underhill Road at an approximate cost \$250,000. This stone-faced wing-wall reinforced concrete-arch bridge was a modern interpretation of the original parkway bridge at this location, which Clarke had also designed. Clad in closely spaced rough-cut and light-colored stone, its wingwalls formed elegant arcs against the landscaped treatments at the bridge abutments.<sup>239</sup>

The demand for parkway improvements continued to increase, but both the TSPC and the WCPC were strapped for funds. The WCPC had continued building parkways throughout the 1930s and 40s, adding the Cross County Parkway and several other developments to its extensive system of commuter thoroughfares. The county charged drivers tolls on some of these parkways, but this revenue could not support the capital improvements required to update the aging roads. The county planned a comprehensive parkway rehabilitation program and turned to the state for support. In January 1960, Governor Nelson Rockefeller proposed the establishment of a state parkway authority to finance a \$50 million parkway rehabilitation program. With the majority of parkways located in Westchester County, Rockefeller's proposal had the full support of Westchester County's board of supervisors. Tying the program to toll-related revenue streams proved to be a controversial idea in the Taconic region, however, despite assurances that the Taconic and Sprain Brook parkways would remain toll-free.<sup>240</sup> Condemning the "growing menace represented by unnecessary, self-dedicated and self-perpetuating authorities," the New York State Automobile Association accused Rockefeller of "selling out motorists" by what it characterized as an "opportunistic expedient." The association claimed that toll roads, rather than improving highway systems, actually impeded growth, citing examples in New Jersey and

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<sup>238</sup> TSPC Minutes, 21 June 1954, TSPC.

<sup>239</sup> TSPC Minutes, 11 May 1954, TSPC.

<sup>240</sup> "Supervisors Urged to Aid Parkway Bill," *White Plains Reporter-Dispatch*, 19 March 1960, 3. The *Poughkeepsie New Yorker* cried, "Taconic Is At Stake," 2 August 1960, 6.

Florida, where, the motorists' group claimed, "needed free road projects have been delayed or killed because of the fear that they would compete with revenue-producing toll facilities."<sup>241</sup>

The TSPC expressed its position in a letter to Westchester County's representative in Albany, State Senator William F. Luddy. The TSPC expressed concern that it appeared inevitable that the TSP would become a toll road under the proposed East Hudson Parkway Authority. Rockefeller's bill made no provision for selling bonds to pay off Westchester's parkway construction debt and tolls on the TSP would seem necessary to fund the improvements. Promises of a toll-free TSP rang hollow with TSPC commissioner Charles Darlington, who informed Senator Luddy that the proposed legislation "seem[ed] little more than a sham."<sup>242</sup> The TSPC has additional reasons for being discomfited by the developments in Albany. Its authority was about to be usurped by an amorphous agency with diffuse interests. The TSPC believed that its achievement in providing an unmatched public recreational opportunity would be compromised if motorists were forced to pay tolls for what had previously been a free benefit. The TSPC could proudly point to the state parks it had developed, but the TSP was its crowning achievement. The TSP was the longest parkway in the state and arguably the most beautiful. FDR's involvement had also endowed it with the notable distinction of a presidential pedigree.

Westchester was a Republican stronghold, however, and home to a large block of voters frustrated with overburdened parkways. Governor Rockefeller maintained a home in the county at Pocantico Hills, moreover, and would clearly benefit from the proposed improvements. When the New York legislature ruled on Rockefeller's plan, the vote split along party lines with Republicans favoring the measure and Democrats lined up against it. The Republicans won. The East Hudson Parkway Authority (EHPA) was established in April 1960 when Rockefeller signed the act into law. The Public Authority Law that had been enacted to create the EHPA was amended in 1962 to give the authority "jurisdiction of construction, reconstruction and improvements of the Taconic Parkway System."<sup>243</sup>

Residents of Columbia County feared that the transfer of authority would mean an end to the parkway project in their region. The *Chatham Courier* predicted the TSP was going to end up as a "dead end road . . . halted right where it is now, out in a field."<sup>244</sup> Plans had not yet been approved to extend the parkway beyond NY 203, and Columbia County residents feared future parkway construction funds would be devoted to projects in Westchester. This was a logical assumption, as three of the four East Hudson Parkway Authority commissioners appointed by Rockefeller were Westchester residents. TSPC Chairman Howland Davis assured the public that the TSP would "fulfill its commitments" to complete the parkway to the Berkshire Spur. An agreement was reached between the TSPC and the EHPA to allow the TSPC to operate and

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<sup>241</sup> New York Automobile Association President William Gottlieb, quoted in the *New York Times*, 16 March 1960, 30.

<sup>242</sup> Charles Darlington to William Luddy, 22 March 1960, letter, TSPC Correspondence, TSPC.

<sup>243</sup> East Hudson Parkway Authority, *Second Annual Report* (n.p., 1962), 4.

<sup>244</sup> *Chatham Courier* (New York), 5 April 1960, editorial.

maintain the Taconic Parkway system under a contract with the EHPA during the 1961-1962 fiscal year on the basis of budgets already submitted to the legislature.<sup>245</sup>

While the northernmost section was still under construction, the EHPA assumed authority for upgrading Westchester County's overburdened parkways. The EHPA was committed to improving traffic flow throughout the region and integrating the TSP into a modernized transportation infrastructure. From 1961 to 1979, when the EHPA was disestablished and the Department of Transportation assumed responsibility for the TSP, the association's pragmatic emphasis would result in significant changes to the parkway's character, as the TSP underwent a conceptual transformation from a recreational parkway into a utilitarian traffic artery.

The EHPA was conceived as a funding scheme to alleviate bond indebtedness in Westchester County, but its essential responsibility was to bring the older parkways into the modern era. Toward this end, the EHPA focused on traffic capacity improvement and design modernization. Westchester's parkways were suffering from years of heavy use and required extensive improvements. Some parts of the TSP were also nearly thirty years old and needed typical maintenance such as repaving, selective thinning of vegetation along the right-of-way to improve sight-lines, and median and right-of-way mowing. The EHPA concentrated instead on large-scale plans to expand the parkway's capacity to accommodate increasing traffic at higher speeds. In January 1962 a major realignment was begun on the Westchester portion of the TSP near Mohansic Park, from Baldwin Road to Crompond Road. This location had become a dangerous and frustrating bottleneck as the parkway swung in tight curves close by the lakeshore and drivers exited the park via an at-grade intersection. Throughout the 1960s the parkway's historic character was gradually altered. In sections of Westchester, Putnam and Dutchess counties, the reinforced concrete road was resurfaced with asphalt, old wooden guiderails were replaced with modern steel guide rails, and realignments and road widening projects were contemplated through Putnam and into southern Dutchess County.<sup>246</sup>

The EHPA preempted the TSPC's legal right to regulate traffic and driving conditions on the parkway. While the TSPC retained authority over its parks, the parkway was subject to rules and ordinances established by the EHPA. The EHPA also regulated speed limits on the Taconic, Sprain Brook and Bear Mountain parkways. From the Kensico Plaza to Miller Hill Road in Dutchess County the speed limit was set at 50 mph. North of Miller Hill Road, travel in excess of 60 mph was prohibited. On the Bear Mountain and Sprain Brook parkways, still only partially completed, driving speeds were limited to 50-mph travel. These rules and regulations were enforced by the state police or by "authority personnel."<sup>247</sup>

One of the first steps toward design modernization was a program to replace the parkway's guiderail system. The EHPA implemented a system of cable wires on wooden posts, modifying the earlier timber post and rail system. This guiderail system was borrowed from Connecticut's Merritt Parkway. The executive director of the EHPA, Ernest Perkins, had previously been chief

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<sup>245</sup> TSPC Minutes, 12 September 1960, TSPC.

<sup>246</sup> EHPA, *Annual Reports*, 1966-69.

<sup>247</sup> TSPC Minutes, 20 November 1961, TSPC.

engineer of the Connecticut Department of Transportation. The unreinforced timber posts introduced by Perkins proved to be inadequate barriers, however, and were dangerous when struck at high speeds. The wood would split and splinter, grabbing cars and spinning them around rather than bouncing them off more or less along the direction of travel. In 1968, a new guiderail system was introduced. A heavy beam-light post steel system replaced the earlier timber guiderails and became the standard guide rail system for the entire parkway. In a gesture to the earlier rustic timber guide rail system, the new box beam guide rails were constructed of Cor-Ten steel, which quickly oxidized to a more rustic-appearing dark brown color. By 1969, 71.5 miles of parkway were fitted with the heavy box beam-light post system of Cor-Ten steel guiderails.<sup>248</sup>

Realignment plans called for additional lanes and an improved interchange at Mohansic Park. Though initiated by the TSPC, the reconstruction program did not begin until 1965 and was overseen by the EHPA. The original two-way undivided parkway was reconstructed as a three-lane southbound drive. An entirely new alignment was constructed for a three-lane northbound drive between Baldwin Road and Compound Road. In 1968, the EHPA extended the reconstruction project south of Mohansic Park for 2.95 miles. The section between Kitchawan Road and Campfire Road was modernized through the addition of an additional lane on the southbound drive and the construction of a new three-lane northbound drive. In 1971, these two segments were joined by a new 3.44-mile section between Kitchawan Road and Baldwin Road. The addition of a new southbound roadway required the construction of a 1,362'-0" steel truss bridge over the Croton Reservoir. Though the EHPA had originally planned to reconstruct the parkway all the way from Kensico Plaza to the Putnam County border, the final stage of the program was not carried out. Total reconstruction in Westchester County, including a 1.3-mile section of road around the Hawthorne Interchange, amounted to 10.2 miles of newly constructed and aligned divided parkway with three lanes in each direction.<sup>249</sup>

While reconstruction in Westchester proceeded rapidly and with minimal debate, the proposed reconstructions in Putnam County were fraught with controversy. By conventional safety standards, the Putnam County section was even more dangerous than the Westchester segment. The fatality rate on the parkway was highest on the section between Peekskill Hollow Road and Pudding Street. Between 1965 and 1966, 710 accidents, resulting in 440 incidents of personal injury and eighteen fatalities, had occurred on this stretch of road. The sharp reverse curves and steep grades in the Putnam County section, the EHPA noted, "result[ed] in a grouping of accidents that is greater than any other location along the parkway."<sup>250</sup> Winter conditions were particularly dangerous. The narrow valleys and heavy forests shielded the parkway from the sun, and the road was often plagued by persistent ice. In response to the dangerous conditions, the EHPA installed a median box beam barrier in the section between Bullet Hole Road and Pudding Street in 1967.<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> EHPA, *Ninth Annual Report*, 1968-69, 13.

<sup>249</sup> EHPA, *Annual Reports*, 1968-69 and 1970-71,

<sup>250</sup> EHPA, *Annual Report*, 1967.

<sup>251</sup> EHPA, *Ninth Annual Report*, 1968-69, 7.

The box-beam barrier system alleviated some of the danger of head-on collisions on the undivided parkway through Putnam County, but it did not address the problem of dangerous at-grade intersections, especially at Bryant Pond Road, where intensive suburban development had created heavy traffic at the existing at-grade exit. The EHPA sought to eliminate both problems by extending its divided parkway scheme into Putnam County and providing modern grade-separated interchanges at hazardous intersections. Blauvelt Engineering Company was hired in a consulting capacity to prepare a location study for parkway realignment throughout Putnam County, between U.S. 6 at Shrub Oak and I-84 at East Fishkill, Dutchess County. A planned realignment would separate the roadway into two corridors for northbound and southbound traffic near Fahnestock Park.<sup>252</sup>

Blauvelt initially investigated fourteen possible corridors for the new parkway alignment. These were ultimately reduced to four alternative routes. The firm recommended a location and plan that would "both improve the capacity of the parkway and enhance its parkway atmosphere." The Blauvelt plan contemplated reducing all curvature on the existing parkway to a maximum of 4°-30'. The "S" curve north of Peekskill Hollow Road would be "materially improved" by flattening the curves to a radius of 1,273'-0". Reconstruction of this section, Blauvelt asserted, would eliminate many curves, which were posted for 45-mph speeds (rather than the normal 50-mph limit through Putnam County). The proposed new alignment would also eliminate the necessity of resurfacing this section and replacing the wooden guide rail.<sup>253</sup>

The EHPA's preferred option called for constructing a new southbound alignment through the Wicopee Valley and Bryant Pond areas in the town of Putnam Valley. This route had the benefit of allowing the existing flow of traffic to continue during construction and utilizing the maximum portion of the existing parkway. Construction costs were estimated to be nearly \$40 million, including land acquisition expenses required for an expanded right-of-way. The new southbound roadway through the Wicopee Valley would not only cut through some of Fahnestock Park, however, it would also isolate a large portion of the town of Putnam Valley between two parkway corridors. The hamlet of Tompkins Corners would be marooned in the parkway median and the 1.5-mile area separating the northbound and southbound lanes would hardly be a practical recreation facility.<sup>254</sup>

Probably the most damaging aspect of the EHPA's proposal was that it would seriously compromise the scenic and recreational value of Fahnestock Park. Fahnestock Park and the surrounding City of Peekskill watershed contained more than 6,000 acres of undeveloped woodlands and lakes, with ancient hardwood trees and historic remnants of nineteenth-century mining operations. When Fahnestock Park had been developed in the early 1930s it was cast a much-needed natural oasis in close proximity to New York City. The park's value had only increased over time. The creation of Fahnestock Park had been a major impetus for the development through Putnam County; by the 1960s the park could be used as an argument

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<sup>252</sup> Blauvelt Engineering Company, "Location Study of the Taconic State Parkway, Route 6 to Interstate Route 84," New York Department of Transportation, Poughkeepsie, New York, 1968.

<sup>253</sup> Blauvelt Engineering Co., "Location Study," 4.

<sup>254</sup> Blauvelt Engineering Co., "Location Study," 4.

against the proposed parkway reconstruction. The parkway had originally served to preserve natural areas; it was now in danger of destroying the valuable recreational facility it created.

The Blauvelt plan met with an organized opposition as intractable as that encountered some twenty years earlier at Lake Taghkanic. When residents discovered that the town supervisor had approved the parkway reconstruction plan without public comment or town board input, an aggressive citizens' campaign was launched to halt the proposed reconstruction. Local residents, including Wylie Sypher of the Putnam Valley Conservation Council, organized the Citizens Committee to Save the Valley. Lending valuable political experience, veteran *New York Times* Albany Bureau reporter Warren Moscow, whose home on Wicopee Valley Road would have been taken for the proposed parkway relocation, joined the committee along with Sierra Club attorney Alfred Forsyth.<sup>255</sup>

At a public meeting in June 1970, the town board, representatives from the state Department of Transportation, and the EHPA heard the citizens' concerns. The Conservation Council claimed the chief benefit ascribed to the plan—ease of traffic maintenance during construction—was vitiated by the long-term destruction it would cause. Sypher pointed out the absurdity of this EHPA proposal, proclaiming, "For a very temporary convenience of road builders we are to allow miles of our most beautiful woods and streams to be paved forever."<sup>256</sup> The Putnam County Board of Education joined the opposition, expecting that longer school bus routes necessitated by the parkway realignment would result in higher taxes. The realigned parkway would also pass through Camp Madison-Felicia, a summer camp for city children. The camp had been relocated to the Fahnestock area when the New York State Thruway took its property across the river in Orange County. Sacrificing the camp property for "maintenance facilities or some other useful purpose" was a difficult argument for the EHPA to make.<sup>257</sup>

The citizens' committee succeeded in stopping the proposed relocation. The Wicopee Valley plan was abandoned, and improvements to the Putnam County parkway corridor would take place piecemeal over the next several decades. Future reconstruction projects would be subject to community input, and enactment of the National Environmental Policy Act in 1969 instituted a formalized process to assess the potential ecological impact of proposed construction projects.

On 1 November 1979 jurisdiction over the Taconic State Parkway was transferred from the disbanded EHPA to the New York State Department of Transportation, Region 8. Recognizing that historic parkways designed over fifty years earlier, were now carrying large volumes of commuter traffic and had become integral to the regional highway system, the NYSDOT initiated the Westchester parkway rehabilitation program, which was intended to bring the parkway system up to modern safety and efficiency standards. Within this framework, the Westchester Parkway Commission was established by the NYSDOT to incorporate citizens' concerns in the decision-making process, reflecting the importance of community input that had

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<sup>255</sup> Wylie Sypher, interview by author, July 1999, Poughkeepsie, New York.

<sup>256</sup> Sypher quoted in, "Putnam Valley School Board Sees New Taconic Route Hiking Taxes," *Peekskill Evening Star*, 16 June 1970.

<sup>257</sup> Blauvelt Engineering Co., "Location Study," 7.

been demonstrated in the late 1960s in Putnam Valley. Future NYSDOT plans would follow this process of including community input and environmental review in parkway reconstruction plans.<sup>258</sup>

NYSDOT continued the EHPA's mission of improving capacity and modernizing design, particularly in the TSP's southern sector. A significant development in the TSP's evolution occurred when the parkway was designated a Scenic Byway in 1992. A comprehensive corridor management plan was begun to ensure that the parkway would maintain a balance between its historic dual role as a tourist-related transportation facility and a commuter thoroughfare.<sup>259</sup>

### THE ROAD AHEAD

In 1993 NYDOT Region 8 initiated a plan to rehabilitate approximately 33 miles of the TSP between NY 44 at Pleasant Valley in Dutchess County and NY 23 in the town of Claverack, Columbia County. NYSDOT plans focused on removing asphalt overlays, rubble-izing the existing concrete pavement and resurfacing it with asphalt pavement. Drainage structures would be removed to a 4'-0" asphalt shoulder, and 3'-0" median shoulders would be added in each direction of travel. The project also focused on re-grading to improve sight lines and scaling back rock outcrops where necessary. Deceleration lanes would be added at Hibernia Road. The Hollow Road at-grade intersection would be removed. In addition, the bridge over the Wappingers Creek in the town of Clinton would be replaced. The planned reconstruction project would significantly alter the historic roadway design, which remained almost completely intact throughout this 33-mile section in Dutchess and Columbia counties.

In 1997 the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPHR) determined that the Taconic State Parkway was eligible for listing in the State and National Registers of Historic Places. Boundaries of the National Register-eligible historic section of the parkway were drawn between the northern terminus at I-90 south to and Route 35/202 in Westchester County. The extensively reconfigured Westchester County sections were excluded from the historic district. The report cited the parkway's significance as an outstanding intact example of twentieth-century limited access scenic pleasure drive development, and emphasized its important role in the history of recreation, transportation, and regional planning in New York State. Based on the State and National Register eligibility determination, NYSDOT and NYSOPHR entered into an inter-agency programmatic agreement to guide parkway management and resource preservation strategies.<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> "Public interest and participation in the Westchester Parkway Program has been encouraged throughout the development and delivery of the program." State of New York Department of Transportation, Westchester Parkway Rehabilitation Program Annual Report, December 1986, P. ii.

<sup>259</sup> LANDSCAPES, et al. "Taconic State Parkway Corridor Management Plan, Final Draft," 9 August 1999.

<sup>260</sup> Kathleen LaFrank, "Taconic State Parkway Determination of Eligibility," 14 October 1997 (on file at the New York State Historic Preservation Office, Peebles Island State Park, Waterford, NY 12188).

The programmatic agreement provided a framework for consultation about the impact of future parkway projects between the two agencies to satisfy the NYSDOT's responsibilities under Section 14.09 of the New York State Preservation Act. The agreement listed a number of stipulations that would guide the design of future TSP projects. These included carefully defined shoulder widths, the use of fluted mountable curbing, the use of rustic-appearing median guiderail to separate opposing traffic lanes, preservation of the parkway maintenance facilities, retention of stone-faced culverts, design of rock cuts at 3 on 1 or steeper, and design treatments for future bridges or bridge modifications to ensure that they would be compatible with the historic parkway bridges. In addition, the programmatic agreement provided for dispute resolution between the two agencies as well as for consultation on future projects not specifically noted in the agreement. Both parties to the agreement acknowledged that the Taconic State Parkway would continue to change to reflect ongoing public concerns, but agreed that coordinated planning was necessary to ensure that efforts to improve the parkway's safety and efficiency would not compromise its scenic qualities, recreational potential, and historical integrity.<sup>261</sup>

The agreement formalized a review process involving OPRHP to guarantee that the parkway's historic qualities were respected as NYSDOT began a five-year capital improvement project. In 1997 the NYSDOT began operating under this agreement as it pursued reconstruction projects to improve the parkway's safety and traffic-handling capacities. In 1999 a stone-faced concrete-arch grade separation structure was erected to carry the parkway over Miller Hill Road, a heavily traveled school bus route that had created a dangerous intersection. The parkway drives were widened on the bridge approaches and moved uphill to the east of the original alignment. This grade separation project improved safety while retaining sensitivity to the surrounding landscape. Demonstrating that contemporary interpretations of historic parkway design could improve safety without sacrificing the parkway's scenic character, the additional height provided by the grade separation structure afforded northbound motorists with an improved, broader and more sweeping view of the Taconic region.

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<sup>261</sup> "Programmatic Agreement Between the New York State Department of Transportation and the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation Regarding Implementation of Projects Affecting the Taconic State Parkway," signed 14 October 1997 and 15 October 1997 (on file with NYSHPO and NYSDOT).

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ADDENDUM TO:  
TACONIC STATE PARKWAY  
Poughkeepsie vicinity  
Dutchess County  
New York

HAER No. NY-316

HAER,  
NY,  
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